A MODEL FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ATTENDANCE IN THE BLACK CHURCH THROUGH SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDY

Michael Johnson

B.A., The College of New Rochelle, 2003
M.Div., Drew Theological School, 2007

Mentors
Donnell J. Moore, D.Min.
Angela D. Washington, D.Min.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....iv

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....v

DEDICATION.....vi

INTRODUCTION.....1

CHAPTER

1. MINISTRY FOCUS.....4
2. THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL.....26
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION.....41
4. METHODOLOGY.....95
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE.....102
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.....111

APPENDIX

A. SMALL GROUP GATHERING.....117

B. SMALL GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE.....120

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....125

ABSTRACT

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by

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The context for this project is the Stonewall Manor Subdivision located in College Park Georgia. The problem is the lack of attendance of African American men in church. This project is designed to increase worship attendance of African American males through small group Bible Study. The hypothesis is if men from the community engage small group Bible study, they would come to church. Weekly meetings and Bible study are the testing activities. Qualitative research will test the progress using pretest and posttest. The expected outcomes of this research are for men to become connected with a congregation in the area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the assistance of many people. First and foremost, God is worthy to be praised for providing the staying power and resolve to get this project completed.

Gratitude and thanks to Dr. D. J. Moore and Dr. Angela Washington for allowing me to complete this project under their guidance and leadership. To the professional associates, context associates, and members of the Friendship Community Church, your support and kindness has been a tremendous help; thank you.

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Sharon Johnson, the most wonderful woman this side of Heaven. In the midst of my work, you were burdened with a dreadful disease. Because of your faith in God, you defeated your disease allowing me the confident to complete this work. Words cannot express the love that is felt for you. As long as there is breath in my body, you will always be in my heart.

INTRODUCTION

Every Sunday, church pews fill up with despondent women who are forced to worship without the men in their lives. In a survey by Ellison Research it was found that 31% of men never attend church even on holidays. This sad statistic prompts parishioners and ministers alike to ask: "Where are the men?" While it's true that several men spend their Sundays satisfying their vices for sports, beer, and sleep, men who don't attend church usually have more substantial reasons for not attending.[1]

There are several reasons that African American men do not attend church. Many reasons African American men do not attend have little if anything with sports and entertainment. According to Ellison Research, there are seven reasons why African American men do not attend worship:

1. Their fathers did not attend church
2. They have to work
3. Too many collections
4. Services are too long and inflexible
5. They have lost faith in God or do not believe in God
6. The church is hypocritical
7. Insensitive pulpits[2]

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[1]Black and Married With Kids, "Seven Reasons Men Don't Attend Church", accessed March 2013, http://www.blackandmarriedwithkids.com/2010/09/7-reasons-why-men-dont-attend-church/.

[2]Ibid.

Each of the following items will be discussed later in this document. What we will find is that the primary reason men do not attend church is because the church does not relate to them and the church historically has not met their needs for fulfillment and spiritual enrichment.

After observing African American men for an extended period of time in the Stonewall Manor Subdivision washing cars, mowing lawns, or raking leaves on Sunday morning, it was evident that these men did not attend any church.

This project is being prepared as an African American men's covenant group to reveal to men that liberation is available to them through the Body of Christ. The context of this project is the Stonewall Manor Subdivision in College Park GA. The hypothesis of this project proposed is a African American Christian based men's fellowship program that will reach out to men who reside in the community. If implemented properly through methodological triangulation a series of surveys, and activities, layered with Bible Study, the writer would be able to drill down to determine what caused these men not want to attend church. The study of Spiritual discipline will provide a biblical framework for building positive relationships that will enable men to connect with one another and prepare them to become active participants in the Body of Christ and to be in Christ. Chapter one describes the author's spiritual autobiography and the setting of this project: Stonewall Manor Subdivision and Friendship Community Church. The context provides information about the membership and the community in which it ministers. In chapter one, the researcher shares his personal journey of transformation, which led to his call to ministry. As part of his personal journey, the researcher reflects on the salient

moments in his life and how the hand of God was leading and guiding even when he did not know it.

Chapter two describes and discusses the importance of the church connecting with men and meeting their needs. It discusses reasons men do not attend church, small group ministry and proven methods for attracting men to church.

Chapter three presents the biblical, historical and theological foundations that support this project research. It will delve into Old and New Testament scripture that calls men to worship; it will speak to the historical reality of men and church attendance and finally it will dialogue with scholars and writers who explore the phenomenon of men being absent from worship.

Chapter four gives a review of the methodology and ministry model that was used to make this project a success. In this chapter, the reader will discover a replicable model of ministry that can be used in any congregation where men are in absent from the worship of the Lord.

Chapter five explains what occurred during the actual implementation of the project. It discusses the compilation of data and how it was collected, analyzed, and distributed.

In Chapter six, the researcher summarizes and reflects on the project, its implementation and overall results. Finally, a bibliography is also provided.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The writer's mother was born to Theresa Johnson to Alice Keeling and Reginald Johnson November 27th, 1930 in Norfolk Virginia. Theresa is the older of two siblings; the younger is a brother. She never completed high school, and by the time she reached the age of sixteen she became pregnant and married John Johnson.

This writer's father, John Johnson was born in Sebrell, Virginia. The date of his birth is unknown, and little is known about his life. John is now deceased.

This writer was born January 12th, 1948 at the Kings Daughters Hospital in Norfolk, Virginia. One year later on February 16th, 1949 this writer's mother gave birth to a baby girl, Cynthia Johnson. The writer and his sister were separated from each other early in their infancy. The writer was raised and lived with the grandmother on his mother's side in Norfolk, while Cynthia was sent to live on the farm with her grandmother on my father's side in Sebrell, Virginia.

The separation of children from their birth mothers seemed to a common practice in the south. Young mothers would relocate themselves to northern cities in order to find work so they could support their children back home. This kind of behavior demonstrated by young mothers had its draw backs. Oftentimes, the mother never returned home, and the children that were divided between families would never have a relationship with one another.

As an infant, early childhood and teen-age years Michael only recognized Alice, his grandmother, as the mother figure for the first fifteen years of his life. Alice also had a son named Marvin. Marvin was a little chubby fellow, light skinned with black wavy hair. Alice raised Michael and Marvin as brothers, and Alice was the only mother Michael knew from birth.

Alice was an amazing woman; she was part Black and part Seminole Indian. Her hair was long black and silky, and her skin was the color of honey. Alice was so pretty that she entered and won the Miss Norfolk Beauty Contest.

Michael lived in Norfolk, Virginia in a two-bedroom unit with a, living room, bathroom, and kitchen in the Anderson Park Apartment. The ideal play area in the apartments was that the buildings were supported by bricks and stilts. This made it easy for us to crawl underneath the houses to play. Directly behind the units was a wooded area which separated the black section of the park from the homes in the white neighborhood. Playing in those woods behind the units was a joyous time. The writer recalls building tree houses, forts, and playhouses out of cardboard boxes with Marvin. Marvin wanted to construct a secret trap door in our tree house and make a rope ladder in the tree house for easy access as well as to gain entrance.

Most of the apartments in Anderson Park were set up in rows, four units to a row. However, there were some that only had two units. Each unit was separated by just a shallow piece of sheetrock and that allowed the adjoining family to hear everything that went on in the unit next to it. In the first unit lived Mr. and Mrs. Hankins, my family lived next door to them. In the next unit lived the Lynch family. Mildred and Obbie Lynch had three daughters Patricia, Zeola, and Helena who I played along with other

children in the neighborhood on a daily basis. On the other side of the walkway lived Johnny and Mary Johnson. The Johnson's had a daughter Maria, and a son Johnny named after his father who we called Johnny boy. Next door to the Johnson's lived Miss Goldie and Mr. Bee. They had two boys Ronnie and Donnie.

Miss Goldie and Mister Bee played a significant and active role in Michael's life. This couple held a young people's Bible study in their home for the children in the neighborhood on Tuesday evenings. Miss Goldie taught us the Lord's Prayer, how to say grace, and how to pray at bedtime. Also during those sessions one of the children was designated to lead the prayer portion of the service, opening and closing in prayer. There was a homework assignment given each week such as learning a Bible verse and be ready to recite it the following week. Mister Bee read to us from the Bible and after he finished reading he would ask one of us to read and he helped us to pronounce the difficult words as we read. As the weeks turned into months reading of the Bible became easy. The Bible stories that were read to us by Mister Bee were so fascinating, particularly the story about Jesus' baptism. The Bible says, "And Jesus when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:16-17). Miss Goldie taught us that God is our Father and He loves us all.

Ronnie and Donnie were twins born minutes apart. The two boys were church babies; they could sing up a storm as the old folks say. However, aside from the fact their parents were the founders of the young people's Bible study; the twins were helpful to all of the new children in making the transition from the world to the church. Miss

Goldie called us young ambassadors for Christ because we were going to represent the Kingdom of God, and tell everybody who Jesus is.

For this Michael, children's Bible study was exciting, and it was fun to be around other children, especially when it was time for snacks at the end of the session. However, what is significant and important is the second phase of Bible study, which was to attend Sunday school, and Sunday morning worship service. Alice would send Michael and Marvin to church with Miss Goldie but she never went to church with them. The name of the church was Christ Temple, and it was Suffolk, Virginia in the country. As an eight year old kid, Michael enjoyed attending Sunday school simply because the lessons were reviewed during Bible study the week before at Miss Goldie's. That made Michael anxious to get there so he could raise his hand because he had studied.

Michael remembers moving into the worship service from Sunday school. Miss Goldie quickly ushering the children to their seats. The deacons would take their place in the front of the church to lead hymns and songs of praise. Someone would read Scripture, and someone would pray. The pastor of the church, Reverend Conn was a short bald man who wore thick glasses that made his eyes looked three times their normal size, especially when he reached the high point of his sermon. Sometimes during the preaching moment, people would get up and run around the church. Other times someone would do the holy dance or get the Holy Ghost and pass out. All of this was freighting to Michael as a youngster but what took away the fear was that dinner was served directly after service. The best part was, the children could eat all they wanted. Aside from the people shouting at God and people getting the Holy Ghost, church was a good place to be.

One Sabbath morning, Reverend Conn extended the invitation to discipleship and this Michael decided to join Christ Temple Holiness Church. The custom was walk down the isle to the front of the church. There the deacons placed a chair in front of the church for potential joiners to sit. This writer accepted Christ at the age of eight. Michael did not know why he wanted to be saved; he just knew that he did. Upon accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior publically, some members shouted with joy, mothers of the church were crying, Miss Goldie grabbed and hugged him, and all the children in the church who were all ready saved gave him big hugs. All of these people had a genuine love for Michael, but it was Miss Goldie and her family who loved him the most. This family nurtured, guided, and helped his development and understanding of God's Word. Michael would draw from this foundation well into his adult hood.

Christ Temple was a loving church family. There was a close emphasis on training for children who lived in the area. This church's focus was on the children that belonged to the church and also the children in the community. Children learned to get along with other children, respect writerity, to be kind to one another, pray and be thankful to God who loves us all. The relationship found at Christ Temple Church was much different from the relationship at home with Grandma Alice.

Christ Temple Church was an important part of this Michael's spiritual development. Miss Goldie taught the Ambassadors for Christ for which this writer belonged; she taught us to be kind to people, show love, and to help others who need help. Miss Goldie used to pray for us, she ask God to take control of our lives, keep us safe and use us to bring others to Christ. These were fond memories. Michael recalls, the first time ever having the breast of chicken was at church. This never happened at home.

The breast was for the grown folk. The mothers of the church not only made sure the children had enough to eat, and made sure we had all we wanted to eat.

Michael started elementary school at the age of six. The name of the school was Richard Allen Tucker Elementary School which was in walking distance from his home in Anderson Park. The school had so much to offer to the children in the community for instance, choir, band, gymnastics, and many other activities. There were field trips to Azalea Gardens, and the Norfolk Naval Base. Michael's favorite subject was history, Virginia History to be exact. How interesting it was to discover the contribution Virginia gave to this nation. There was the succession from England, the love story between Captain John Smith and Pocahontas, Jamestown, Fredericksburg, Williamsburg, Sir Walter Raleigh, historical colleges founded, the slave movement, and Virginia's contribution of presidents to America.

The main event and the most exciting event in elementary school was square dancing. When the month of May rolled around that meant preparation for May Day. This was the time that dancing with a girl was crucial in the life of a young boy. Michael had a crush on a girl named Carolyn Kelly and he hoped she would be his partner. What fun it was to be all dressed in our white pants and blue shirts as we did our square dance and rap the Maypole. The entire day was full of excitement. There were three legged races, fifty yard dashes and of course the breaking of the piñata. These were fond memories. One recollection comes to mind was when Michael's grandmother had to come to school and speak with the principal's office because he hit a girl. After we left the principal's office his grandmother beat him with a switch all the way home. Alice told Michael to never strike a girl for any reason. He remembers when he and his friend

Spunky came upon some big kids beating up a girl behind the gym. They watched for a moment not really knowing what was going on or why. Later they heard that the girl was raped. We did not know what rape was but we knew it was wrong. Spunky and Michael never told anyone about the incident but discovered later that the boys had been apprehended.

In the summer months, folk in the neighborhood would sit outside on the front porch to cool of because it was hot in the house. For amusement parents played music for the kids to dance to, afterward they would play red light green light and Simon says. Also in the summer Aunt Theresa would come from New York to visit. That was a great time for because she brought gifts for Marvin and me. The time spent together was memorable because of the special way Michael was treated.

Along with the happiness of Michael's aunt's arrival would be the discovery she was his mother. This new development in his life made him angry. Alice did not share this with him and neither did Theresa. Michael learned the truth from the kids he played with all of his life. He knew there was something going on because every summer she came, she made his life special. However, when it came time for her to go back to New York, Michael would cry because he wanted her to stay.

The kids in the neighborhood knew that Alice was not his mom because their parents were discussing it in front of their children. Michael does not believe to this day that his mother and grandmother knew the extent of his pain, or the psychological effect it would have on his life. After finding out the truth about his mother, Michael was ashamed to go outside to play with the other kids. He would cry at night, and wondered

why this happened to him. He wondered why he could not have parents like the other children in the neighborhood?

Anderson Park Apartments had a foundation of bricks on each end that allowed kids to crawl under and play. There was one incident that occurred where he, Marvin, and Johnny boy went over to the white peoples section and stole some basset hounds. They brought them back put them under the house. They did not know at the time they were hunting dogs, and as soon as night came they began to howl and continued howling through the night. Everyone knew who was responsible for stealing those dogs. But being found out did not stop them. Another instance, this writer got a collie that he called Lassie, and another time he and Marvin took a German shepherd that they named Rin Tin Tin because the dog resembled the dog that starred in the television program.

Another fond memory that comes to mind having growing up in Norfolk was fishing in the lake that was formed out of the Elizabeth River. All of the neighborhood boys swam in that lake, caught mussels, shrimp, and crabs there. What was fascinating about catching crabs was how they were caught. The crabs were caught at night using a metal basket, some twine and a flash light. The basket was lowered in the water, while shining the light on the basket and the crabs would come to the light. However, the best memory was when the three of us build a makeshift boat. The boat was made from an old canvas tent and a step ladder. Also a few broken branches were placed across the midsection to keep it from collapsing. Upon completion of the vessel it was launched and as soon as it hit the water the boat immediately sank. It was the funniest thing that happened to us.

Michael will never forget being a boy scout and going on a weekend camping trip in the forest. Scouts slept in tents, made their own fires, cooked food, breakfast and dinner in utensils called mess kits. At nightfall, they sat around the campfire listening to their scoutmaster's camping stories and urban legends. Being a boy scout was like being a part of a real family having a real father. The scoutmaster was a type of father to them. During the time of Jim Crow and segregation, there were many Black boys without fathers; this made scouting and important part of growing up because the scoutmaster was a type of father. The scoutmaster was the male figure who taught Black boys character and to have integrity.

Growing up in Virginia in the 1950's and 60's was a time of segregation. Black people could not go down town in Norfolk to shop, eat, go to a movie or even stroll down the street. Downtown Granby Street was exclusive only to whites. Black folk had to shop on Church Street. Norfolk is a seaport city, and Church Street was the place where all the shops, bars, restaurants, and movie theaters were; it was where all the Black sailors and Black service men went when they came home on leave. What a sight to see Church Street full of sailors in their white uniforms in the summer and navy blue in the winter, what a sight to behold. Going down to Church Street was the best time for Michael because the local Black radio broadcasting station WWRAP was located on Church Street. The stations disk jockey's name was Jack Holmes who had a broadcasting booth in the front of the station right on the street, and we would go by to say hello to him; he would give us hard candy called whisky drops, and announce our names on the radio.

Alice's husband Marvin was a Navy man. Marvin served on the USS Forestall, an aircraft carrier that was as large as some cities. Every Thanksgiving and Christmas when

the ship was in port, granddad's commanding officer invited all the sailors' families aboard ship for dinner. On Thanksgiving we ate a meal fit for a king. At Christmas diner there were toys given to the children, toys from all around the world; Egypt, Spain, and England. In his house you could find a toy from almost every continent, English racers, starter pistols, water guns, swords, stuffed animals, bicycles, and handmade toys.

Grandfather was a muscular man who looked like a body builder. As a little fellow, he looked a Black Hercules. Marvin had mussels everywhere, and he had a stallion black complexion. It was a great time when Marvin was home. He would take us to Roberts Amusement Park which was for Negroes, that's what we were called during that time. There were carnival rides, hoppy horses, cotton candy, clowns, a bearded lady, a muscle man, a fat lady, a magicians, merry go rounds and a gypsy. These were fun times for us.

It was a day when Marvin would have to ship out. There were times where Marvin would be gone from six months, and other times, a year to eighteen months. It was a sad occasion for all of us.

Marvin made arrangements for Alice to receive an allotment check from the Navy on the first and the fifteenth of the month. Unfortunately when the month carried five weeks there was not enough money for food because there was only enough money to last four weeks. When this situation occurred there would not be enough food in the house to last until the next month. I had asthma and little Marvin had a bronchial condition.

Alice would take some Vicks Vapor Rub put some in a shallow pan and heat it up. After which, she would start with Michael by sticking his head under a blanket with

the heated pan of Vicks. As he inhaled the vapors from the Vicks his congestion would clear up. She would repeat the same ritual with Bay. This form of treatment would continue with us until we could get to doctor Bucks office.

Alice used some home remedies on us that really worked, however, I do not know if they would be considered legal. For instance, one winter morning before going to school Alice would give us two or three drops of turpentine on a sugar cube in a teaspoon before we walked to school. And when we can home from school she would have a cup of sassafras tea for us from the roots. However, there were two remedies that were the most hated. Alice called one of the remedies a mustard plaster and the other was taking castor oil. When we had a chest cold, the cure was to place the mustard plaster on our chest to draw out whatever it was that made us cough. Alice gave us castor oil in a teaspoon, but first she warmed it up, then she gave us an orange slice to cut the nasty taste.

It appeared that these illnesses would flare up just around the time when money and food was low. Although, at times there was not enough food in the house to eat, Alice would boil some onions in water and add the heels from loaves of bread and that would take us through. When we were sick, she would take us on Church Street to doctor Buck. He was part Seminole like Alice. When we arrived at doctor Buck's office she would knock on his door to let him know we were there because he did not have a receptionist. Doctor Buck examined us first, than he gave us shoots for our illness, and tootsie roll pops for the trip home. When he finished with us Alice went in. I did not know it then, but now it is clear to me that my grandmother and doctor Buck had an

affair. On the way home Alice would stop by the grocery store to get a few groceries. It appeared that doctor Buck had given Alice money to help out.

Alice had a gas stove in her kitchen and when those days approached, when the money and food was low or there was not any food or money in the house, Alice would call my brother and me to the kitchen to pray. While gathered around the kitchen table she would pray, but what we did not know is that she turned the gas on while she was praying. As young boys, Marvin and Michael did not know that the gas stove could explode and all of us would perish. This incident would be one of many turns of events, and a series of surprises that would occur throughout Michael's life.

Alice is the woman who taught us to say grace over our food, taught us how to say our bedtime prayers, she taught us how to iron our clothes, shine our shoes, comb our hair and brush our teeth. Alice straightened our hair and made sure our pants and shirts were starched and pressed for school. This remarkable woman never opened a Bible but she could quote scripture chapter and verse. The Bible stories she told us were so real to us that in our minds, we wanted to play with the Baby Jesus. Alice never attended church but she made sure we went.

As to why she turned on the gas we will never know. But thank God she turned it off. Alice knew how much Michael and Marvin loved Jesus and she would use His hanging on the cross as a discipline tool toward us. For example, if she thought we had done a mischievous act and we were not forthright about it, she would tell us that where they pierced Jesus side would bleed every time we told a lie. As young children it was impossible for us to know what was going on in Alice's mind at the time.

The revelation that my aunt was in fact my mother was difficult for me to process. From Tucker elementary school Michael went to Abraham Lincoln where he completed six and seventh grades. It was here he developed serious social problems and got into fights with classmates. All he could think of was the lies, why, why; he did not know how to cope with his mother during this time in his life.

While living in Virginia, Michael completed part of the ninth grade. One morning after he got off the bus on his way to school and spotted my grandfathers car parked on the street. Excited that he was home, Michael caught the bus back home and told Alice where he saw his grandfather's car. Alice asked Michael to show her where the car was parked so he took her to where the car was and then continued on to school.

After a week or so had passed Alice told Michael she was sending him to New York to live with Theresa, his mother. I was apprehensive about going but I had no choice. Theresa enrolled Michael in the Wyandanch, Junior Senior High School where Blacks, whites and Puerto Ricans attended.

Wyandanch was an interesting place. Everybody in the community knew each other. The man who delivered our oil owned the oil company. The supermarket employees were Black, the bank employees were Black, bus drivers, and our insurance man is Black. There were Black and white teachers in the school district, and all the sports teams, girls and boys were interracial. What was most exciting was when Michael entered school there were Black kids and white kids attending the same school and in the same class. Not only that but Michael soon discovered that white teachers would teach him.

Michael took a retailing class at school and allowed him to work in the school store. That experience allowed Michael to get a job after school working in one of the department stores in town. Michael's high school years were full of fond memories. He took a home economics course, which taught him to cook, sew using patterns, and a sewing machine. His crowning moment was when he made a two-piece suit for himself. In addition, because he maintained a job throughout high school, He was able to buy his first car for three hundred dollars. It was a nineteen fifty-seven Buick convertible, black with a white top and black rippled leather seats which he drove to the prom.

In 1966, Michael was sent to Fort Jackson South Carolina for basic training for eight weeks and then to Fort Lee Virginia for Quarter Masters school, and for Advanced Infantry Training, Fort Benning, Georgia for jump school, Fort Bag, North Carolina with the 82nd Airborne Division, and finally to Fort Campbell, Kentucky to serve with the 101st Airborne Division.

In 1967 the entire 101st Airborne Division was airlifted from Fort Campbell, Kentucky to Vietnam. Prior to departure, Michael was able to spend some time with his wife. His daughter was born while he was in Vietnam. My base camp was in Bien Hoa Vietnam. The boys had arrived, everything was in place them and the next day the platoon would leave on another mission. The second platoon Sergeant, Sergeant Woolford came to the supply to exchange old boots for new ones. This was the first time seeing him. He told Michael whom he was and that Michael would be assigned to his platoon as a Radio Transmitting Operator (RTO). An RTO is that person who follows the platoon Sergeant whereever he goes in combat to call in air strikes on the enemy's position. Sergeant Woolford saw that Michal had a comfy cozy job in the rear so he

replaced him with a white boy and gave him the white boy's job as an RTO. This turn of events was devastating to Michael for this job was almost certain death. The practice of replacing blacks within the field was prevalent throughout Vietnam towards Black soldiers.

The next turn of events would come when I received a Dear John letter from my wife. A Dear John letter is a letter you get from your wife or girlfriend telling you they have fallen in love with another man. Michael knew the guy she had taken up with and he was angry. It was not long after receiving this letter that he turned to drugs and no longer wanted to come home; he reenlisted for another year, which changed his military commitment status from two years to three.

When Michael's tour of duty in Vietnam ended, he did not tell anyone when he was coming home. He was Honorably Discharged from the Army on November 15, 1969. He went to his mother's home and surprised everybody. The first thing Michael asked his mother was where he could find his daughter. He had never seen his daughter; he knew he had a daughter but did not know her name. Michelle is my daughter's name, which is Michael in French.

I convinced my wife to leave Michelle with me for a while and she agreed. I filed the divorce papers with the courts, and while going through the proceedings, Michelle was living with me at my mother's house in Wyandanch. My next stop would be to visit the Spencer family. The Spencer's were the family that I adopted when I first came to Wyandanch.

Eventually Sharon and Michael began to date. The courts granted his divorce and his ex-wife allowed Michelle to live with him. Whoever thought that the girl in high

school who used to borrow his sweaters to match her skirts would form a lasting relationship with Michael? While Sharon and Michael were dating he continued to use drugs, heroin, alcohol, and any pills he could get my hands on. Michael managed to keep a job and keeping his addiction hidden.

One year later Sharon and Michael were married; bought a home in Wyandanch, Long Island, New York where they lived for thirty-two years. Sharon became a teacher, and Michael was employed by the Long Island Rail Road Company. Sharon was a member of the Holy Trinity Baptist Church in Amityville, New York. Sharon and Michael were not in their home six months when his ex-wife took Michelle from school, and he was unable to get her back.

Sonja, Sharon's daughters father James was killed in Vietnam and Michael is the only father Sonja knows. In 1973 Sharon gave birth to a baby girl we name Su'Ona.

Sharon was a Christian woman whom Michael admits raised his girls well. The girls were taken out of public school and attended private schools. The girls were in church as infants. Although Michael grew up in church, in his adulthood he did not want any part of church. Sharon had the girls in Sunday school, and choir up until they went to college. Although Michael ran the streets and used drugs, his children never knew he had a drug problem. Every year from the ages of twelve to fifteen, Michael would take the family to the Macys Thanksgiving Day Parade. This was such a hit with the girls that when they went off to college they talked about going to the Thanksgiving Day parade that their girl friends wanted to come home with them to go.

Every choir anniversary or church event, Michael was always there with his camera taking their pictures. The people at the church were annoyed because he would go

directly to the front of the church to take his girls picture. Eventually Michael started attending Sunday school at Holy Trinity. He enjoyed the adult Sunday school class because he could talk. The lessons taught in Sunday school were lessons taught to Michael by his grandmother, Miss Goldie, and Mister Bee. Eventually, he began to go to church, and about the same time he asked God to deliver him from drug use. God used Michael's family to turn his life around and get him in church. He stopped going to the places he used to go and did not realize he was on a one-way journey of spiritual power.

After attending church for over a period of time, Michael found himself having problems with the preaching and the kinds of sermons that were being preached. He had a concern that people needed to know the truth contained in the Bible, so he enrolled in New York Theological Seminary in New York for two years and received a certificate in Christian Ministry. He received a Masters of Divinity from Drew Theological School in Madison New Jersey; presently he is enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry Program at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. When he look back over my life I can honestly say that I am a blessed man, God has truly been good to me.

In May 1998, Michael preached his initial sermon at the Holy Trinity Baptist Church. In October 2006, he was ordained at the Faith Baptist Church, Coram, New York. He would have never in all of his dreams thought he would be respected by family members and friends lest of all being called to preach. He knows now that all the disappointments and surprises that occurred in his life it was nothing but God who delivered him.

Today, Michael still has issues he struggles with. For instance, he has never called Theresa mother to this day. Although, he knows that she is his mother he still finds it

hard to believe a mother does not reveal who she is to her children. He phones her on holidays and her birthday hoping during one of those phone conversations she would say to me I'm sorry. It's very difficult to know you have a mother in name only and know relationship. Maybe one day he'll sit down with her and ask why?

His next issue is that of affirmation. He's caught between to schools of thought. The first thought is his father to affirm him as a man and say to him that he is well pleased. And the second thought is maybe it's just as well that he was not around because the end result would not be a positive.

Sharon and Michael have been married for over forty years by the grace of God. Sharon has a BA from Stony Brook University, a Masters from C. W. Post. Sharon is retired from thirty-two years of teaching in the Long Island, New York School System. Michael retired after twenty-five years from the Long Island Railroad Company, Jamaica, Queens. Sonja is a graduate from Howard University; she is married to her husband Richard Roberts together they have two daughters, Jada, and Dana, residing in Damascus, Maryland. Su'Ona is married to Kwaku Thompson, no children yet, and they reside in Harve De Grace, Maryland.

Michelle, Michael's oldest daughter and he have rekindled their relationship. She has two children a girl and a boy, Martika and Marvin.

Context of Ministry

Friendship Community Church is the ministry site of Michael Johnson where he serves as an associate pastor. It is housed on eighty-two acres and has over ninety active ministries. Because Friendship is a nondenominational church, communal policy and member flexibility are major reasons for the churches long standing success. For

example, one does not have to become a member of the church before she/he can fully participate in ministry. Some if not most churches require membership before you can be in ministry.

Since 2005, Stonewall Manor has been an affluent, thriving community with a modern feel. It is a progressive family orientated community in the heart of South Fulton, less than 20 minutes from downtown Atlanta and close to fine dining, parks, and art galleries providing the best of what the Atlanta metro area has to offer.[1]

Demographics for Stonewall Manor Subdivision

Population	
Total Population	64,618
Male Population	30,308 (46.9 %)
Female Population	34,310 (53.1 %)
Percent Change Since 1990	41.0 %
Percent Change Since 2000	19.0 %
Density (Persons per sq. mile)	1,398.00
Median Age	30.82
Employment	
White Collar	16,505
Blue Collar	5,246
Households	
Total Households	22,763
Family Households	13,948

[1]Stonewall Manor, accessed February 2010, http://stonewallmanoratl.com/.

Non-Family Households	8,815
Households With Children	9,029
Households Without Children	13,735
Average People Per Household	2.83

Education

Number of people who have achieved the following levels of education:

No High School	835
Some High School	2,440
Some College	10,317
Associate Degree	2,950
Bachelors Degree	8,548
Graduate Degree	3,351

Marital Status

Number of people who have the following marital status:

Never Married	19,545
Married	17,212
Separated	3,465
Widowed	2,048
Divorced	6,429

Income / Financial

Average Household Income	$48,803
Median Household Income	$47,364
Median Income Under 25	$34,147

Median Income 25-34	$41,824	
Median Income 35-44	$49,366	
Median Income 45-54	$57,170	
Median Income 55-64	$51,933	
Median Income 65-74	$45,795	
Median Income Over 75	$39,922	
Percent increase/decrease in income since 1990	52.0 %	
Percent increase/decrease in income since 2000	20.0 %	
Average Household Net Worth	$363,996	
Median Household Net Worth	$109,060	
Median Home Sale Price	$154,500	
Median Total Debts	$126,309	
Sales Tax Rate	8.0000 %	
	30349	USA
Percent Religious	65.80%	48.78%
Catholic	10.20%	19.43%
LDS	0.74%	2.03%
Baptist	17.00%	9.30%
Episcopalian	2.12%	0.63%
Pentecostal	2.44%	1.87%
Lutheran	0.70%	2.33%
Methodist	13.41%	3.93%
Presbyterian	3.37%	1.63%

Other Christian	11.28%	5.51%
Jewish	2.14%	0.73%
Eastern	1.01%	0.53%
Islam	1.38%	0.84%[2]

From the demographic data above, this project has the potential for substantial positive results. The data indicates that over 49% of the total population in the Stonewall Manor area is male. Church attendance is 65% of the total population with approximately 35% of the area is unchurched. Of those who attend church, Baptist, Methodist, Catholic and Other Christian Groups comprise over 51%. The Other Christian Groups is where Friendship Community Church would fall with 11.28%. This means that Friendship Community Church is a well-recognized congregation in the area; this creates great potential for attracting men into the fellowship and membership.

The small group model of ministry that will be used for this doctor of ministry project is no stranger to Friendship Community Church. Small groups are the hallmark of Friendship and every member and non-member attendees are encouraged on a weekly basis to find a small group to serve in outside of worship. This is another reason the congregation is a thriving and vital congregation within the greater Atlanta Metropolitan area.

[2]Stonewall Manor Demographics, accessed February 2010, http://homes.point2.com/Neighborhood/US/Georgia/Atlanta/South-Fulton/Stonewall-Manor-Demographics.aspx.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL

In this chapter, the reader will be exposed to several ways to attract men to congregational life. While there is a known absence among African American men in the church world-wide, the presupposition of this project is that more men would attend church and get involved in church mission and ministry when they are engaged in small groups. African American men must have an entry point where they can find common ground, a sense of belonging, fellowship and are able to involve themselves in meaningful activities and projects that matter to them. We will discuss reason men do not attend church as well as models and churches who have good success in attracting and maintain a health portion of African American men in their congregations.

According to Frank Chipperino, small group ministry is a vital part of sustainable congregations. He offers six reasons that churches cannot afford to do without them. In this particular article, Chipperino was responding to a blog that said that the fate of small group ministry is dwindling down to a grinding halt. Chipperino's response to the statement was, "To say that group ministry is dying is saying you do not understand the purpose of group ministry, and you do not know how to implement it in your environment. Every ministry model has its weaknesses. Small groups are no different.

They have their weaknesses, and I will not pretend to hide behind them, but there are some benefits to small groups that cannot be ignored."[1]

The six reasons that churches cannot do without small group ministries are:

1. Healthy Community - if your goal is to foster community in a church. We have already established that small groups provide discipleship opportunities for intentional leaders, but there are lots of other benefits that churches experience from a healthy small group community.

2. Help Big Feel Small - It is no secret that there is one major fear people have in going to a large church: No one knows them! Small groups change that experience.

3. Pastoral Care - Group ministry is the front line of pastoral care in the church. Group leaders and members are the first responders to crisis in a large congregation.

4. Evangelism - We have to stop thinking of small groups as Bible studies. Small groups facilitate relationships that result in evangelism. Some of these small groups can be softball; kids play group, volleyball, dog walking, tennis, scrapbooking, and others.

5. High-Priority Communication - Do you need to get the word out fast about something important in the church? Leverage the small group ministry network.

6. Volunteer Network - Small group ministry can rally the troops to get a job done faster than any other method existing in the church at the present time.[2]

Small groups will continue to exist in all of our communities—with or without churches. I just hope that churches pay more attention to group ministry, because without this vital ministry, churches are the ones at risk, not groups, says Chipperino.

Not only are small groups necessary and vital to the sustainability of congregational life, small groups can also be instructional in that they can provide support and awareness of many areas of the church. Here we will discuss disciple-making

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[1]Frank Chipperino, 6 Reasons You Need to Start a Small Group, accessed March 2010, http://www.churchleaders.com/?news=141557/.

[2]Ibid.

groups, task oriented groups, fellowship and ministry groups, care and self-help groups, study groups, and cell groups.

Disciple making groups should aim at producing men and women of spiritual muscle, who learn personally from the Master as they walk daily with him. Such disciples live by the Word, contribute to the work of the church, and influence the world for the cause of the gospel. To develop successful disciple making groups take these four steps, 1) Create a vision for disciple making to hold out to your group members that is worth of significant sacrifice in time and energy; 2) Develop a process that produces your product. Drawing on insights from the scriptures, each church must define what it means by a disciple and then develop a process that helps produce such a person; 3) Equip leaders and release them for ministry. Disciple making groups face two main challenges: the support and care of leaders, and the potential for groups to become ingrown. To support leaders, hold regular meetings for encouragement, problem solving, and training in areas of group process, listening skills, care giving, leading dynamic discussions, developing apprentice leaders, and mastering spiritual disciplines.[3]

Task-oriented Groups develops a growing number of faithful volunteers in almost any area of ministry. A task group is distinct in that it is not just a traditional fellowship-building group or a team of people simply fulfilling a task. By definition, task groups attempt to accomplish both fellowship and ministry at the same time. The principle mission of a task group is to set aside a thirty to forty-five-minute group time to develop the spiritual and relational life of each team member. People tend to join a group because

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[3]Building Church Leaders, "Six Types of Small Groups to Help Churches", accessed March 2010, http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com/articles/2002/le-scan-020611.html?start=8.

of the task they want to work on, but ultimately they will stay because of the mutual caring among the group members.[4]

Care and self-help groups initially emerged primarily to assist people with their addictions. Participation in these groups tended to be long-term. More recently, self-help groups have emerged to help people cope with myriad other life problems. A divorce-recovery group would be a good example of such a coping group. Participation in these groups tends to be short-term.

Study groups study scripture to meet God, discover God's priorities for its members, and learn how best to respond. This is why group study is so powerful. Together we can discover more and explore more options for creative response. New groups should start with inductive Bible study, aiming to discover truth from a Scripture passage with little or no reliance on other references. They can begin by observing the text, then interpreting their observations, and, finally, applying the truth they discover.[5]

The cell group is a small, intimate gathering that intentionally brings people face-to-face on a regular basis. Members share common goals and seek to grow together in the grace and knowledge of Christ. They tend to follow the New Testament church in its structure as they break bread and fellowship together, they gather for a specific purpose and, they gather to meet and evangelistic need.[6]

Shepherding groups are necessary with today's emphasis on church growth and with the blossoming of larger churches. Congregations must be ready to respond to the

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[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid.

inevitable decrease in one-on-one contact with pastors. Personal pastoral care can come in other ways, such as through trained lay leadership in shepherding groups. This not only brings relief to overworked pastors, it also produces a caring, loving atmosphere that pervades the entire congregation.[7]

Church growth specialists say that the establishment of strong friendships is one of the most important reasons people commit themselves to a church. Studies also show that a major reason people drop out of church is the feeling of not belonging. Though a church may have an overflowing sanctuary and dynamic preaching, members may still lack the meaningful fellowship they seek.

These first two examples share how small group ministries assist congregations galvanize member participation, fellowship and a sense of ownership in the life of the church. However, it is important to identify models of small group ministry that are currently in place regardless of their effectiveness.

In an article from Retro-Christianity Reclaiming the Forgotten Faith entitled, "7 Church Ministry Models from Ideal to Awful" stated that there are six essential building blocks of a local church; orthodoxy, order and ordinances are the essential marks of a local church, and evangelism, edification, and exaltation are its essential works.[8] Each of these building blocks is biblically and theologically based. The *ideal* represents a ministry model that most authentically and effectively promotes a balance of the marks

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[7]Ibid.

[8]Retro-Christianity Reclaiming the Forgotten Faith entitled, "7 Church Ministry Models from Ideal to Awful", accessed March 2010, http://www.retrochristianity.org/2012/02/13/7-church-ministry-models-from-ideal-to-awful/.

and works of a true local church and more intimately and effectually maintains a pulpit/altar-centered worship.[9]

Direct correspondence exists between a neglect or abandonment of essential marks and works of a church and the adoption of ministry models that fall farther down the scale. Simultaneously, as a church adopts ministry models farther from the ideal, it becomes necessary to re-define, modify, or reject the essential marks and works of a church. Principles and practices are closely united as one ascends or descends the scale—either a lack of ecclesiological principles drive a church toward a poorer pattern of ministry, or a misguided pragmatism drives out ecclesiological principles.

Model one is *The Small Community*. This model consists of small, intimate, manageable community with qualified personal pastoral presence for discipleship, accountability, and encouragement. To maintain intimacy and manageability, a single-meeting community desires to remain small—between 100 and 250 people. Among this community, the pastoral leadership strives to maintain direct relationships with church members. The pastor and elders know their flock well, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and are attuned to their needs. This incarnational presence among the community makes discipleship more intuitive and natural rather mechanical and programmatic. Accountability is a natural part of a covenanted life together. And encouragement toward faithfulness emanates from both the pulpit and interpersonal relationships. The small community model may often function as part of a larger mother-daughter network model (Model 2), and it does not preclude the possibility of

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[9]Ibid.

denominational or inter-ecclesial associations to cooperate and pool resources for larger-scale projects.[10]

Model two is *The Mother-Daughter Network.* Small to medium churches in a network with qualified on-site pastoral presence in each local church plant. Many growing churches have made the conscious decision to cap the numerical growth of a local church by strategically planting smaller *daughter* churches as evangelism and discipleship begin to cause membership in the church to increase and sprawl. Rather than treating all small groups as interdependent communities under the umbrella of a larger local body, smaller groups serve as seed groups for future church plants. The goal is not to maintain financial and organizational control and oversight. Rather, the goal is to establish a fully functioning, self-sustaining small community bearing in itself all of the essential marks and works of a local church. In this case a pulpit/altar-centered worship can be easily maintained in all of its intimacy and efficacy.[11]

Model three is *The Medium Congregation.* Medium congregations of smaller flocks maintain pastoral personnel among the flocks for discipleship, accountability, and encouragement. Medium means churches between 300 and 1000 people. The larger the church community, the more difficult it is to maintain a meaningfully intimate fellowship of the entire church membership. While organizational and financial unity can be maintained, intimate community and mutuality among all members must take place in subsets of the larger body. The smaller groups within a church variously manifest themselves as home groups, Sunday school classes, fellowship groups, or discipleship groups. The church strives to be a congregation of small groups, not a congregation with

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[10]Ibid.

[11]Ibid.

small groups. In other words, church membership implies smaller group membership.[12]

Model four is *The Larger Church.* Large multi-service churches usually have voluntary opportunities for intimate community among smaller flocks under qualified pastoral leadership. The challenges toward whole church unity, intimacy, and authenticity that begin to surface in the medium congregation grow more acute in the larger church of between 1000 and 2000 members. Eventually a decision must be made to either build a larger facility or hold two or more services. Planting daughter churches as in Model two is not part of the larger church strategy. A move from personal pastoral presence to professional pastoral leadership occurs when trained, ordained leaders usually become disconnected from the congregation.[13]

Model five is *The Mega-Church.* This model consists of large auditorium multi-service campuses with opportunities for programmed events and voluntary flocks led by less-qualified lay leaders. The *mega-church* is more of a mentality and methodology than a matter of head-count. However, the financial and facilities resources necessary to maintain the programming usually require at least 2000 people—often many more. In order to sustain the mega-church model, a typical mega-church must shape its ministries around an attractional methodology—If we build it, they will come. The growth strategy is usually epic—If too many come, we build bigger. Those who initially attend a mega-church ministry are often drawn to specific aspects of the church—youth, singles, marrieds, discipleship, worship, special programs, contemporary atmosphere, a celebrity pastor, etc. All of these various elements must therefore be maintained to sustain high

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[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid.

attendance, which must be sustained to support the high cost of maintaining the various ministry elements.[14]

Model six is *The Multi-Site Church*. The Multi-site church campuses usually broadcast messages from the main campus. The multi-site church should not be confused with the early planting stages of the mother-daughter church network (Model 2). In the multi-site mentality, the mother church has no real intention of actually cutting organizational or financial cords with the daughter church. The sprouts are not church plants but merely branches of the same giant tree. The multi-site campus is usually a function of three elements: 1) a sprawling church membership scattered throughout a usually metropolitan area (as opposed to a genuinely localized community church membership); 2) a strong devotion and dedication to a well-known celebrity preacher whose messages become the basis for unity; and 3) a willingness to simulcast preaching from the main church or play recorded messages from the celebrity preacher and regard it as authentic pulpit ministry.

Model seven is *The Remote or Online Church*. This model is usually identified as the self-styled church. Here, leadership encourages remote (radio/television) or online-only experiences with no real pastoral or community presence. This model is distinct in that these churches encourage the remote or online church experience as a full and sufficient relationship to the church. This is therefore the multi-site mentality individualized and taken to an extreme. It completely detaches the pulpit from a real pastoral relationship with a congregation, and it utterly trivializes the biblical, theological, historical, and practical significance of the altar. Neither intimacy nor efficacy

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[14]Ibid.

characterizes the ministry of the remote or online church. The marks and works of the church, if present, are not functional in any significant way.

According to the author, models one and two are the most significant way to do church in this the 21st century. In both of these models, pastoral presence and leadership is critical and groups are small enough for the pastor to at least be able to touch members when necessary. The larger the number of members, the greater the propensity to lose a sense of belonging and the essential building blocks of any local church gives way to a socialized methodology of people being caught up in the moment rather than being caught up in the spirit of the living God.

Similar to the seven group models just presented is the notion of small group as community. In the book entitled, *Creating Community* by Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, a case for belonging and community is made. In this offering, it is suggested that regardless of how popular the pastor or how great the ministry and activities, at some point members are going to want to connect at a deeper level than corporate worship and work groups. At some point, members are going to want to become relational with persons with like interest who they can pray, fellowship, share concerns and support one another in their journey toward eternal life.[15]

Stanley emphatically states that in order for small groups to be effective, a small group culture must be created. No small group can survive unless there is an intentional cultural presence that becomes the motivating factor behind its creation. It becomes a part of the church's lifecycle and allows the members of the group to *do life together with*

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[15]Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, Creating Community (Colorado Springs, Co: Multnomah Books Publishing, 2004), Introduction.

other couples and people. In order for the culture to be galvanized in the life of the church, senior leadership must be engaged in the process first.[16]

It seems that every book's author has a list of why it's important for small groups to be created in the life of the church. In *The Small Group Book: Practical Guide for Nurturing Christians and Building Churches*, authors Dale Galloway and Kathi Mills suggest that in order for care for others well, you must invest yourself relationally in small group ministry. They believe small groups provide the following:

1. Multiple points of entry into the church
2. Provide an effective form of evangelism
3. It is the only true way to care for people
4. They accelerate the spiritual growth of the people in the church
5. They properly shift the work of the church to the people[17]

Small groups are not an option if people are to be cared for, nurtured and equipped for ministry. If people are not prepared, they cannot do the work of the gospel which is evangelizing, discipling and caring for others.[18]

While there are significant numbers of people who are writing and designing models for successful small group ministry, there are just as many who are writing about the messy, painful, and disasters that occur when small groups do not go well. Since our purpose is to move men from the Stonewall Manor subdivision to connecting with the church, it is important to continue down the road of successful models of small group

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[16]Ibid.

[17]Dale Galloway and Kathi Mills, *The Small Group Book: Practical Guide for Nurturing Christians and Building Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H, Revell, 2000), 10.

[18]Ibid., 12.

ministry without minimizing the reality that not all congregations are contextualized to receive and thrive using the small group model.

Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas team up to write and interesting book about doing small groups an entirely new way. In *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups*, the authors identify the goal of their book is to help readers develop small group systems that are exciting and help realize God's dream for your church.[19] The ultimate purpose of the church is to move people from the Community as they come to know God and learn to be fully developing followers of Jesus. Sometimes, leaders get caught up at the congregational level and forget about the people who comprise our crowd and the greater community.[20]

If evangelism is moving people from the community to the crowd, then small groups is moving people from the congregation to the committed and from the committed to the core. Small group systems should be first and foremost for those who are not yet involved in them. If your primary focus is on serving your congregation with groups and not on connecting the people who make up your crowd, your momentum will turn inward and your growth will stop. You must constantly ask, what are the needs of those who are not in a group, and how do I set up a system to focus on getting new people actively involved in a small group.[21]

M. Scott Boren, Group Publishing presents a 21st century approach to small groups in, *Small Group Ministry in the 21st Century.* This particular book is a guide for

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[19] Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2008), 7.

[20]Ibid., 12.

[21]Ibid., 12-13.

establishing successful small groups in any congregation. The first step in establishing a small group is to promote its existence. The Boren Group advocates asking the following questions before you begin to promote your group:

1. Who's your audience
2. What do you want them to do
3. Why should they join your group
4. Where and how should you promote your group
5. What should you do if someone expresses an interest in joining the group
6. Are you praying[22]

Next is a discussion on practical ways to establish a meaningful agenda for the group.

1. Pray for wisdom
2. Use icebreakers
3. Pray a prayer of adoration
4. Pray For Specific Needs
5. Promote a sense of safeness
6. Pick relevant Bible study material
7. Read biographies about Christian singles
8. Stress the positive aspects of singleness
9. Encourage service
10. Encourage accountability

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[22]M. Scott Boren, Group Publishing, *Small Group Ministry in the 21st Century: The Encyclopedia of Practical Ideas* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, Inc., 2005), 14.

11. Look for and discuss singles' trend in pop culture

12. Encourage social outings[23]

In *How to Get Men to Join Small Groups*, Andy Lie says that many small groups began out of existing groups that have either lost they purpose, became too large, lack a sense of relational direction or are have poor organizational leadership. He suggest that when this occurs, the group has to be willing to 1) restart with prayer; 2) create a place for connection; 3) Create a safe space for sharing; 4) Create a culture of invitation; and 5) create a culture of service. For Lie, it usually all begins with the phrase "Dude…want to get some coffee?"[24]

Charisma Magazine has an article entitled, "Consider the 5Ws and 1H of Men's Small Groups." The article says that men who are seeking to develop a closer walk with the Lord, and to discern His will for their lives should become active in a small group. Small groups work best when several men have developed relationships and have begun to develop trust. Men from outside the church can and should be encouraged to participate in men's small groups.[25]

The structure of small groups according to Charisma Magazine is similar to other writers, however, Charisma gives a time limit of no more than ninety minutes with a typical format looking like:

Informal fellowship while the group gathers

Open with prayer

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[23]Ibid., 250.

[24]Andy Lie, How to Get Men to Join Small Groups, accessed October 2012, http://www.churchleaders.com/?news=137671/.

[25]Charisma Magazine, "Consider the 5Ws and 1H of Men's Small Groups, accessed October 2012, http://www.charismamag.com/life/men/16776-consider-the-5ws-and-1h-of-men-s-small-groups.

Study/Discussion (30 minutes)

Sharing time (30 minutes)

Period of prayer (30 minutes)

Over the course of this review, it becomes obvious that men are difficult in reaching and maintain in the life of the church. The concepts that have been presented here provide solid foundational material for any church to begin using if they are interested in growing a segment of their population that has been absent for years. Men need to feel included, they need to be relational, a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, value, trust, fellowship and a reason for continuing to commit. While this is no easy task, many churches are redesigning their approach to men with just these issues in mind. They are not necessarily abandoning sports, work projects and food. What they realize that these ways of attracting men are short lived and has limited staying power. Men are most captured and committed when they are engaged at a heart-felt level and they know that their contribution is significant to the overall goal of the church.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Thus far, the reader has been exposed to a dilemma that is has plagued the church for some time; the lack of male participation in the church. While some congregations have had relative success in attracting and maintaining men in worship, very few have had long-term success in this area. This chapter will discuss the biblical, historical and theological foundations that support the notion that when men are engaged in relevant small group ministries, they would eventually make their way to becoming active participants in the life of the church.

Biblical Foundations

Old Testament

Small groups are not new. The basis of today's small group ministries can be traced back to the Old Testament. The small group begins with the very nature of God. Genesis 1:1 launches the biblical record with a simple yet profound statement that God (Elohim) is the Creator of all that exists. The word Elohim is plural, designating or incorporating more than one person. Our own needs for and use of groups is a logical

extension of the fact that God exists within the divine form of a small group. Of course the term small group is not used in scripture, but neither is the word Trinity.[1]

From the entire nation down to the smallest family unit, a large and small group mentality permeated the Jewish existence. When we consider a nation, we discover the Israelites were a chosen people; God set them apart from all other peoples on the face of the earth (Dt 7:6). They were chosen not because they were large in number, but because they were few in number and God loved them (Dt 7:7-8). They formed a great family called the house of Israel (Ex 40:38). The Israelite family served as the model around which the nation was internally organized.[2]

Then there was the *tribe.* The house of Israel, by virtue of its descent from the twelve sons of Jacob, was divided into twelve subgroups or tribes (Gn 49). Tribes provided the leaders with a method to administer and guide the people. These tribal sub groupings were established clearly by the time the land of Canaan was divided among the Israelites according to their tribes and families (Jos 13-22).[3]

From tribes emerged the *family or clan.* Here, we discover that tribes were broken down further into groups of relatives known as clans or families. By the last year of the Israelites' wilderness journey, fifty-seven families existed among the twelve tribes.

An even further division was established called *households*. This literally means *house.* The various clans were divided down into family subgroups or relatives living in

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[1]John Warren, Thoughts of John, "Biblical Mandate for Small Groups", accessed October 2012, http://johnwarren.wordpress.com/2010/06/26/biblical-mandate-for-small-groups/.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

the same dwelling, including servants and dependents. Households typically incorporated several generations of relatives and servants.[4]

The final division of the Israelites was comprised of *fathers or men*. Here, a specific man, including his wife and children, was the smallest group within the Jewish identity. A single-family unit could exist as part of a larger household or as a separate entity. Individual family units were the heart of Jewish society—the primary small groups.[5]

At some point, one would have to wonder about the selection process of being a chosen people, who are they and how were they chosen. The answers to these questions can be found in the Bible. As you study the scriptures, you might find that what you have been taught is in contradiction with the Word of God. If this is so, it is because you have been taught a *system*, not the Bible. What does the term *chosen people* really mean? Many think immediately of Israel. Is this correct? The Bible says, "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God: the Lord your God has chosen you to be a special people to Himself, above all people that are on the face of the earth" (Dt 7:6).

To whom was this spoken? A look at Deuteronomy 6:3-4 reveals it was spoken to Israel. At that time, Israel consisted of all those that came out of Egypt with Moses (Dt 7:8). A very similar verse is Deuteronomy14: 2 which says, "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a peculiar people to Himself, above all the nations of the earth." In 1 Chronicles 16:13, Israel is called "His chosen ones": "O you seed of Israel His servant, you children of Jacob, His chosen ones." David

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[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

wrote: "Blessed is the nation, whose God is the Lord, and the people whom He has chosen..." (Ps 33:12). And, "O you seed of Abraham His servant, you children of Jacob His chosen...He brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with gladness." (Ps 105:6, 43).[6]

Isaiah records these words from the Lord, "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, My friend...You are My servant; I have chosen you, and not cast you away." (Is 41:8-9) "'You are My witnesses,' says the Lord, 'and My servant whom I have chosen....'" (Is 43:10). "...I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen." (Is 43:20). "Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen:" (Is 44:1). In Isaiah 48:12, the Lord refers to them as *My called,* and Daniel calls them *His chosen people* (11:15).[7]

From the above, it can be seen that the phrase, chosen people definitely applied to Israel. But, what was the composition of Old Testament Israel? According to the Bible, Israel was made up of the descendants of Jacob (Ex 1:1; Jo 13:6, etc.), and, those who joined Israel through circumcision and keeping the law (Ex 12:48f).[8]

Keeping the covenant was a requirement for all those who wished to remain a part of Israel, "And the uncircumcised male...shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant" (Gn 17:14). "Whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day [of the Feast of Unleavened Bread], that soul shall be cut off from Israel...for

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[6]Ken Davies, International Preterits Association, 'Who Are God's Chosen People", accessed November 2012, http://www.preterist.org/articles /who_are_ chosen_people.asp.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid.

whoever eats anything leavened, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger, or born in the land" (Ex 12:15,19). These Scriptures, and many others, show that membership in the nation of Israel was dependent on obedience to God's commandments. To disobey God was to lose one's citizenship.

When most people think of Old Testament Israel, they think exclusively in terms of Israel as a nation. Yet, this is not the true biblical meaning of Israel. The Old Testament scholar A. R. Hulst has shown that the name Israel has always had twofold significance: one national, and the other religious. For example: "...you [Israel] will be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex 19:6). The prophecy of Amos (9:11-12) proclaims that the remnant of Israel would be "largely an entity of religious instead of national destination." Isaiah says much the same thing, "[God's] house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations. The sovereign Lord declares—He who gathers the exiles of Israel, I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered." (Is 56:7-8).[9]

The noted scholar Hans K. LaRondelle has demonstrated conclusively that the primary meaning of Israel in the Old Testament "stands for the religious covenant community, the people who worship Yahweh in Spirit and truth. Secondarily, it denotes a distinct ethnic group or nation, which is called to become spiritual Israel. Decisive for the Old Testament prophets and their prophecies is the theological quality of the 'people of God,' not their ethnic and political characteristics."[10]

Contrary to the claims of Hal Lindsey, and other dispensational authors, the blessing of Israel's election was not unconditional. "The purpose of the election is service,

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[9]Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983), 81.

[10]Ibid., 90.

and when the service is withheld, the election loses its meaning, and therefore fails....If she [Israel] ceased to acknowledge Yahweh to be her God, then she declared that she no longer wished to be His people. Her high calling to be the Chosen People was not the mark of Divine indulgence or favoritism, but a summons to a task exacting and unceasing, and election and task were so closely bound together that she could not have one without the other."[11]

Did Old Testament Israel lose her election? As Paul would say, "God forbid!" The Old Testament prophesied in many places that a remnant would be saved. The question is: Of who was this remnant to consist? According to Jeremiah 31:31-34, the remnant would be made up of those who know the Lord, and whose sins would be forgiven completely (unlike under the Old Covenant; Heb 10:1-4). This was to be made possible through the initiation of a New Covenant." This New Covenant (or Testament, KJV), was ratified by Jesus at His crucifixion, shown to His disciples in symbolic form in the Last Supper (Mt 26:28 and parallels; 1 Cor 11:25).

Is New Testament Israel any different from Old Testament Israel? If so, how? The Israel of the New Covenant is made up of those descendants of Jacob who believed in the Messiah (Mt 10:6; 15:24; Acts 2:36-41; 21:20, etc.), and, those who joined Israel through spiritual circumcision and the keeping of the new law (Rom 2:28-29; 13:10; 1 Tm 1:5). With the establishment of the New Covenant, physical descent was no longer a determining factor for entrance into Israel. Only those who believed in the Messiah could enter or remain a part of Israel. The Bible says, "The Lord called you [Israel] a thriving olive tree with fruit beautiful in form. But with the roar of a mighty storm He will set it on fire, and its branches will be broken" (Jer 11:16). Verse 17 says this was directed to

[11]Ibid., 92-93.

"the house of Israel, and the house of Judah." Hosea says of Israel, "His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree...." (Hos 14:6).[12]

Paul picks up the olive tree motif in Roman 11:17-24. He says those Jews who rejected the Messiah were themselves rejected and broken off from the olive tree of Israel (v. 20). The apostle showed that the only possible way to remain a citizen of Israel was to believe in Jesus as Messiah. This citizenship was also offered to the Gentiles on the same condition. If they would put their faith in the Messiah of Israel, they would be made fellow citizens of Israel (cf. Eph 2:19). "Christ created His Church, not beside Israel, but as the faithful remnant of Israel that inherits the covenant promises and responsibilities. Christ's Church is not separated from the Israel of God, only from the Christ-rejecting Jewish nation."[13]

The identification of the Church with Israel is explicit in Peter's first epistle: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God...." (1 Pt 2:9). Here, Peter definitively states that those who "believe" in Christ Jesus (1 Pt 2:7) were the chosen race and the holy nation (1 Pt 2:9; compare Ex 19:6; Dt 7:6; and 14:2). "Only in Christ could Israel as a nation have remained the true covenant people of God." God's covenant people are no longer distinguished by racial or territorial characteristics, but exclusively by their faith in Christ. The land we have inherited is a spiritual one.[14]

According to Jewish belief, Jews are the Chosen People because they were chosen to make the idea of one God known to the world. It all began with Abraham, whose

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[12]Ibid.

[13]Ibid., 102.

[14]Ibid., 106.

relationship with God has traditionally been interpreted in two ways: either God chose Abraham to spread the concept of monotheism, or Abraham chose God from all the deities that were worshiped in his time. Either way, the idea of chosenness meant that Abraham and his descendants were responsible for sharing the word of God with others.

God's Relationship with Abraham and the Israelites

Why do God and Abraham have this special relationship in the Torah? The text doesn't say. It certainly was not because the Israelites (who later became known as Jews) were a mighty nation. In fact, Deuteronomy 7:7 states, "It is not because you are numerous that God chose you, indeed you are the smallest of people." Though a nation with a massive standing army may have been the more logical choice to spread the word of God, the success of such a mighty people would have been attributed to their strength, not the power of God. Ultimately, the influence of this idea can be seen not only in the survival of the Jewish people to this day, but also in the theological views of Christianity and Islam, both of which were influenced by the Jewish belief in one God.[15]

Another aspect of chosenness has to do with the receiving of the Torah by Moses and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. For this reason Jews recite a blessing called the Birkat HaTorah before the rabbi or another person reads from the Torah during services. One line of the blessing addresses the idea of chosenness and says, "Praised are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the World, for choosing us from all the nations and giving us God's

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[15]Ariela Pelaia, "What Does It Mean for the Jews to be the Chosen People", accessed November 2012, http://judaism.about.com/od/judaismbasics/a /jewsas chosenpeople.htm.

Torah." There is a second part of the blessing that is recited after the reading of the Torah, but it doesn't refer to chosenness.[16]

Misinterpretation and Different Views of Chosenness

Non-Jews have often misinterpreted the concept of chosenness as a statement of superiority or even racism. But the belief that Jews are the Chosen People actually has nothing to do with race or ethnicity. In fact, chosenness has so little to do with race that Jews believe the Messiah will be descended from Ruth, a Moabite woman who converted to Judaism and whose story is recorded in the biblical Book of Ruth.

Jews do not believe that being a member of the Chosen People gives them any special talents or makes them better than anyone else. On the topic of chosenness, the Book of Amos even goes so far as to say, "You alone have I singled out of all the families of the earth. That is why I call you to account for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). In this way, Jews are called to be a light to the nations (Is 42:6) by doing good in the world through gemilut hasidim (acts of loving kindness) and tikkun olam (repairing the world). Nevertheless, many modern Jews feel uncomfortable with the term Chosen People. Perhaps for similar reasons, Maimonides (a medieval Jewish philosopher) did not list it in his foundational *13 Principles of the Jewish Faith.*[17]

The three largest movements of Judaism—Reform Judaism, Conservative Judaism and Orthodox Judaism—define the idea of the Chosen People in the following ways:

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[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

1. Reform Judaism views the idea of the Chosen People as a metaphor for the choices we make in our lives. All Jews are Jews-by-Choice in that every person must make a decision, at some point in their lives, whether or not they want to live Jewishly. Just as God chose to give the Torah to the Israelites, modern Jews must decide whether they want to be in a relationship with God.

2. Conservative Judaism views the idea of chosenness as a unique heritage wherein Jews are able to enter into a relationship with God and effect change in the world by helping create a compassionate society.

3. Orthodox Judaism views the concept of the Chosen People as a spiritual calling that ties Jews to God through the Torah and mizvot, which Jews have been commanded to make a part of their lives.[18]

From the perspective of Rabbi Alan Lurie in the article, "What Does It Mean that the Jews Are God's Chosen People." Laurie says, No doubt this statement causes an emotional response. There are few concepts in religion that are more emotionally loaded and more misunderstood. If you are Jewish, the idea of Chosen People probably feels very uncomfortable—perhaps as an offensive, divisive, or outdated claim of superiority, which has been at the root of anti-Semitism. This is why the very idea of chosenness had been removed by some modern Jewish denominations. Or you may feel proud, pointing to the extraordinary achievement of Jews, and the very fact that Jews have miraculously survived for thousands of years in spite of constant persecution and attempts at annihilation.[19]

And if you are not Jewish this statement may sound like a claim that somehow God loves Jews better than others and has given them special treatment. Maybe you understand Jewish chosenness as an outdated, broken covenant, or as a holding position until a future time when Judaism will no longer be needed. And for those who insist on

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[18]Ibid.

[19]Rabbi Alan Lurie, "What Does It Mean That The Jews Are God's Chosen People", accessed May 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rabbi-alan-lurie/jews-gods-chosen-people_b_1079821.html.

viewing religion as inherently divisive and anti-rational, the idea of Chosen People is seen as proof of the danger of religious doctrine and as undermining any attempts at reconciliation.

All of these responses, however, demonstrate a profound misunderstanding of the nature of chosenness (and, like most uninformed interpretations, say more about the person making the claim that the issue itself). The Jewish concept of the Chosen People is not a badge of superiority and separation. Quite the contrary: Jewish chosenness is a humble call to action and responsibility. Jews are chosen much as one may say to a child: "The room needs cleaning, and I choose you to do the work; you are my 'chosen' child." In this way, all people are chosen for something. Jews specifically have been chosen to, or have chosen to, be of service to others so that the world may be a more just place.[20]

This is not a spin or an apologetic, but is a theological and historical fact. Judaism traces its beginnings to Abraham who, according to the Bible, was the first human being to recognize the truth that everything and everyone emanates from the same Source. And with this recognition comes the call to personal and communal transformation. Whatever your believe about Abraham—that he was a real person, the mythologizing of a tribal chief, or a fabricated character—does not matter, because the reality is that Judaism has understood his story as a call to kindness and hospitality. And while one can—and at times ought to—find serious flaws in Abraham, his flaws are deliberately shown so we can know that one does not need to be perfect in order to be of service, and that

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[20]Ibid.

answering the call will inevitably lead to personal struggle and mistakes. Abraham is not a perfect human; he is a human who seeks to be more.[21]

Chosenness continues when the Jews received the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai. Again, whether historical fact or fiction matters not one bit, because we do have the Ten Commandments, and they came to the world through the Jews. While one can be critical, most criticism also comes from a deep misunderstanding. The Bible and Jewish literature does not refer to these as commandments, but as statements that flow inevitably from one to the other.[22]

This begins with the essential and revolutionary recognition that there is an eternal, loving, involved consciousness that is the creative and sustaining force of everything. With this knowledge the rest of the statements naturally follow: we will not desire to worship the idols of egoic gratification because we will see that these are illusions; will not use spiritual insight for personal gain (the real meaning of "not taking God's name in vain"); will honor our time and set aside a day to reconnect to Spirit; will feel gratitude for life and to those who gave us birth; will see others as fellow creations of God who must not be abused in any way; and finally we will not be jealous of others or want what they have because we will know that to compare ourselves is to be ungrateful for what we have been given. This radical understanding of the dynamics of life has slowly changed the world for the better.[23]

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[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid.

New Testament

Small groups in the New Testament take on a different form and shape of the Old Testament. While the Old Testament focused on the chosen people of God and how they were broken in various subgroups, the New Testament speaks of groups of believers meeting regularly in the intimacy of a home rather than a church building. This house church was a Christian fellowship group formed in and/or around a house (Gr. oikos). Paul speaks of such a church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor 16:19; Rom 16:3, 5), of Philemon (Phlm 1, 2), and of Nympha in Laodicea (Col.4:15).[24]

The use of oikos to describe the group of believers was not intended just to be a spatial marker but a group identifier as well. Indeed the oikos was a significant sociological unit already. According to Acts 2:46, the believers met in these houses to break bread. But on the basis of the wording, we could say that they broke bread according to or by house (kat' oikon). Similarly, when they met for teaching, they did so by house (kat' oikon). The phrase according to house or by house then becomes a unit of measure because of its use in a distributive rather than in a simply locational sense.

The case for the house church as an identifiable unit of the early Christian community can also be made linguistically, for the words oikos and oikia were used interchangeably for this phenomenon. These two words have a range of meaning that includes the literal sense of house as well as the metaphorical sense of family, household, clan, and even the bigger tribal unit such as the house of Judah. This broad range of meaning is the case in both the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) and the New Testament. However, in the Septuagint and in secular Greek usage, when the word oikos

[24]Kwabena Donkor, *Ministry Magazine*, "New Testament House Churches: A Model for Today's Complex World", accessed October 2012, https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2008/04/new-testament-house-churches.html.

is used with God's name, it refers to the temple or sanctuary with Numbers 12:7 as the exception.[25] But the exception of the Old Testament is the unique feature of the use of oikos in the New Testament, where the idea of the house of God "is transferred from the temple to the congregation worshipping there."[26] The point is that a real sense exists in which the house became a unit or group in the structure of the early Christian community.

One can hardly tell whether, as a result of the early church's preference for the metaphorical use of the phrase house of God, the house church model was intended to be normative. Clearly, however, the metaphorical use of house of God made it possible for the New Testament writers to further clarify the truth about the Christian community with such concepts and images as foundation (1 Cor 3:10–12), cornerstone (Acts 4:11), living stones (1 Pt 2:5), and pillars (1 Tim 3:15).[27]

It seems clear that the house-church model was a real Christian model, for it was found both within the Jerusalem Christian community and in other communities, including those that Paul established in his missionary efforts. With the book of Acts as the primary source of information on the use of houses in the primitive church in Jerusalem, there were at least two, possibly more, of these churches in Jerusalem. First, Acts 1:12–15 depicts the disciples, after Christ's ascension, as returning from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem, entering a house whereupon they went into an upper room. The upper room, a common feature of architecture in the East that occupied the second or third floor of a house, was a fairly large room for rest and relaxation. To the extent that

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[25]Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology,* vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 247.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Roger W. Gehring, *House Churches and Mission* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 1–225.

here was the place where the disciples and the believers totaling 120 continually gathered, experienced community, and prayed (1:14; 4:31)—possibly breaking bread and teaching and preaching (2:46; 5:42)—this upper room served as a house church.[28]

Second, Acts 12:10–17 records a meeting of believers in the house of Mary, mother of John Mark. The observation that many were gathered together praying (v. 12) clearly suggests that this was a fairly large house-worship setting. Other details of the narrative, such as a gatehouse with a servant girl, suggest a distinguished house. Peter came to this house on the night of his liberation from prison, implying that he knew the house and knew that believers would be gathered there, the period being Passover (12:2–4). Most scholars agree that the house in Acts 12 should be distinguished from the upper room mentioned in Acts 1, with verses 12 and 17 of chapter 12 implying at least two distinct places of assembly. When Peter told the believers in Mary's house to tell James and the brethren, he may have indicated another group of believers elsewhere.[29]

There are other practical reasons to suggest that in Jerusalem there were probably a plurality of house churches and not just the two possible ones mentioned above. If the church grew as rapidly as recorded in Acts 2:41 and 4:4, the two houses alone would not have been adequate for the believers. In calling these groupings of the early believers churches, it is critical to examine the nature of the activities that took place in their meetings.

- Worship service. Acts 2:42 provide a list that seems to indicate an agenda for early Christian worship. The list includes teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer—needful activities in the worship experience of any religious community. Apart from the houses, the only other place of assembly for the believers was the temple, but it is unthinkable that these activities of worship

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

could have happened in the temple. Therefore, we may conclude that the believers consciously saw the houses as their churches and undertook the worship services there.

- Teaching. Although the first Christians taught in the temple court and took part in the prayer services there that did not prevent them from engaging in their own teaching activities in the houses.

- Fellowship and breaking bread. The word for fellowship is koinonia, which connotes a God-given unity of heart and mind and signifies a close connection among the believers for mutual support and involvement in each others' lives, both spiritually and materially (2:44, 45; 4:32–37).

- Prayer. In the list referred to above, prayer is in the plural. It hints, at least, at two possibilities on the prayer practices of the early believers: as a critical part of the bread-breaking event, possibly at the end of it, or as an imitation of the Jewish prayer times in the house setting.[30]

The power of the house-church setting as an evangelistic strategy should not be missed. Acts 5:42 reports that in the temple and from house to house the believers kept on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. To preach Jesus as the Christ, in the context of Jerusalem, would for all intents and purposes qualify as an evangelistic kind of preaching. Also, the experience of Peter and Cornelius recorded in Acts 10:23–48 would seem to not exclude the possibility that houses, even of believers whose households were not entirely Christian, would become the staging grounds for evangelistic activity. The intense fellowship of heart and mind (Acts 4:32, NIV), which the house church would foster, expressing itself materially, could be compellingly attractive to neighbors. Indeed, given the context that the believers had favor with all the people (Acts 2:47, NKJV), it is not unreasonable to conclude that the adding to their numbers day by day was partly a result of that favor with the people.[31]

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[30]Donkor, "New Testament House Churches."

[31]Ibid.

On the basis of these activities carried out in those house locations may we not legitimately, theologically, call these groupings churches? The evidence for house churches in Antioch is not explicit, but scholars suggest that this would have been the case for a couple of reasons: this was the pattern for the early Christian movement, and early converts appeared to have been God-fearers, including affluent ones (see Manaen, for example, in Acts 13:1), who could make their homes available for assemblies. Also it is suggested that one relatively small house church of Christians would not have caught the attention of the residents of Antioch as Acts 11:26 suggests. Finally, the prevarication of Peter in his relation to the Gentiles (Gal 2:11–14) may also be taken as evidence for the existence of separate Jewish and Gentile congregations that on occasion came together.[32] On the assumption that the house churches in Antioch were possibly patterned after the Jerusalem model, the issues of organization, worship service, and mission would also apply to Antioch churches.

Paul's letters recognized the existence of house churches. Acts contains reports of house meetings in Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Troas. We need not be detained by details on these and other individual churches, but simply note the texts that possibly mention them: Philippi, (Acts 16:11–15, 25–34); Thessalonica (Acts 17:1–9); Corinth (Acts 18:7, 8; Rom 16:23; 1 Cor. 16: 15, 17); Cenchreae—Phoebe is described as prostatis meaning patron (Rom 16:1, 2); Ephesus (Acts 18:18, 19, 26; 1 Cor 16:19); Rome (Rom 16:3, 5, 10, 11, 14, 15); and Colossae (Philemon 1, 2). Further, as in Jerusalem, there was the possibility of more that one house church in these cities; for

[32]Robert Jewett, "Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church," Biblical Research 38 (1993): 23–43.

example, in Philippi—in the houses of Lydia and the jailer—and in Corinth—on the properties of Aquila and Priscilla, Justus, Crispus, Stephanas, and Gaius.[33]

Some New Testament scholars, arguing instead for tenement churches, have questioned the existence of house churches in Paul's time. The latter would be crowded, low-rent apartment housing where believers might be able to meet together only after joining several apartments. It is argued that the social status of the early Christians was such that they could not have had their own houses. The argument, however, is hardly provable either on the basis of archaeology or the biblical evidence.[34] Phoebe probably had a slave background, but she was a patron. The evidence seems convincing that Christians of the churches on Paul's missionary trail met in the houses of some affluent members.

First Corinthians 11 and 14 contain data relevant to the worship service at the church of Corinth. Some discuss whether or not 1 Corinthian 11 and 14 talk about two separate worship services; one for Communion celebration and the other a service of the Word. In any case, from these two chapters we can be certain about the elements of the worship service: song, prayer, teaching/instruction and prophetic speech, as well as Communion. We could expect that the elements of the worship service at Corinth were present in other Pauline churches: Romans 12:3–8 mentions service, teaching, exhortation; Ephesians 5:19 speaks about teaching, singing of psalms, hymns, and songs;

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[33]Ibid.

[34]Gehring, *House Churches and Mission,* 148–151.

and Colossians 4:16 gives an indication that at least Paul's letters were read to the congregation at meetings.[35]

The role of Pauline house churches in missionary activities seems to have been dictated by Paul's missionary philosophy. Convinced that he had to preach the gospel to the entire world, Paul visited important cities, following the commercial routes of the time. Paul's churches, then, fit into a framework where they functioned as cells from where entire cities were to be reached. The fact that Paul did not stay in the cities to make the cells full-fledged churches speaks to the point (1 Thes 3:1–5). Thus, it would have been natural for the house churches to see themselves as bases for missionary work, assisting in providing the needed resources.[36]

The picture that emerges from the discussion so far indicates that in many of the cities where the early church found a home, including Jerusalem, there were a number of Christian groups operating simultaneously. But what sense did these groups have of themselves and how was their sense of identity maintained? These questions address issues of organization and leadership. Acts 8:1 speaks about the church in Jerusalem in the singular. Yet the evidence presented above suggests the existence of at least two, and possibly more, house groups of believers. Acts 2:42–47 and 4:31–37 provides a picture of a community of believers with a community of goods and the added suggestion that all the believers must have, on occasion, met at the temple for common fellowship. It seems, then, that at some level in the community life of the believers in Jerusalem, they had a common or general organization, whereas at other levels the community was organized along the lines of the individual house groups. Thus, we see at least a two-level form of

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[35]Ibid.

[36]Ibid.

organization. The argument could be extended to the Pauline churches, at least in Corinth. The possibility of a number of house churches in Corinth has been noted, yet Paul, in addressing his first letter to the Corinthians, made it out to the church of God which is at Corinth (1 Cor 1:2). Against the background of a plurality of house churches in Corinth, possibly the statement "if the whole church comes together in one place" (1 Cor. 14:23, NKJV) could refer to a gathering of all the house churches at one place on occasion.[37]

Although there may have been several individual house churches, all of them saw themselves as belonging to the church in their respective cities. This probably was the sense of identity they had; not an unreasonable one given the fact that Paul's missionary philosophy may have led them to see their communities as bases or cells for evangelizing their cities. Thus, their missionary goal informed their organization. Such a system of organization could not have functioned without a corresponding leadership. With the church in Jerusalem, leadership appeared to be clearly in the hands of the apostles. What about Pauline churches? First Thessalonians 5:12 give us a clue as to the leadership and nature of leadership functions in these churches. Paul urges the church to respect a specific group of individuals. The Greek word for respect (eidenai) means literally to know, which "by itself . . . means to 'identify' or to 'take note of' those listed as its objects."[38] Describing this group of individuals, Paul uses three participles in the present tense: those who work hard (koipiontas), those who are over you (proistamenous), and those who admonish you (vouthetountas). New Testament scholars have noted that the

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[37]Jewett, *Tenement Churches and Communal Meals,* 28.

[38]D. Michael Martin, The New American Commentary, 1, 2 Thessalonians (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Pub., 2002), 171.

use of a single definite article to introduce all three participles indicates that a single group is intended. Furthermore, the use of the present tense implies that these functions were not sporadic in nature but consistent and habitual activities in the congregation. As to the nature of the leadership functions, working hard describes strenuous physical labor needed to support a ministry both physically and spiritually (1 Thes 2:9; 3:5). Here is indicated strenuous effort put out to secure the material and spiritual welfare of the congregation. Standing over, however, has a range of meanings including presiding over, directing, caregiving (Rom 12:8), and managing (1 Tim 3:4, 5). Finally, admonishing may involve instructing, usually with the goal of exerting a corrective influence (1 Cor 4:14).[39] Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:12 in the context of verses 20, 21 may lead us to conclude that some in the congregation may have been facing the risk of being misled, and such needed to show respect to those who worked hard among them, stood over them, and admonished them.

The question as to how leadership was constituted is not particularly relevant to our interest here, although it must be noted that the householder seemed to acquire leadership authority in the church. In any case, enough evidence exists to show that leadership functions were firmly in place in these congregations as a way of maintaining their material and spiritual health. In Corinth, Paul challenged the believers to submit themselves to the household of Stephanas and others who appeared to have a special position and exercised leading roles. Like those in Thessalonica, they had devoted themselves to the service of the saints (1 Cor 16:16). Certainly, if there were no leadership structure in Corinth, it would have been senseless for Paul to expect certain

[39]Ibid., 173.

members of the congregation to resolve the internal conflicts of the church (1 Cor 6:1–5).[40]

Elsewhere, in the church at Philippi, a brief mention is made of leadership functions provided by episkopoi (overseers/bishops) and diakonoi (deacons), functions that appear to be designated as offices. Here we see a formal, ongoing leadership function. As far as leadership to coordinate the activities of the various house churches is concerned, the duty appears to have rested mainly on the apostles. Paul called himself the father of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 4:15). He exercised the overseer function in the churches he founded, employing in no small measure the medium of letters to exercise that function from a distance. He also had several coworkers for missionary purposes (Timothy, Titus, Silvanus, etc.). In addition, we should also keep in mind the role of some central leading authorities in Jerusalem: in sending Peter and John to help Philip (Acts 8:14); in possibly calling Peter to account for his dealing with Cornelius (Acts 11:1–18); in the council dealing with the issue of Gentiles and rituals (Acts 15); and in commissioning Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Gal 2:2).[41] Although all the details of organization and leadership are not clearly available, the early church had in place structures and leadership patterns that held together what seems to be a plurality of house churches.

In the early church, it seems that in many ways the house churches were vibrant and successful Christian congregations in carrying forward the gospel. The house church was an authentic Christian unit. There may have been several house churches at any one

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[40]Gehring, *House Churches and Mission,* 193.

[41]Ibid.

time in the cities where the gospel took root. In each of these congregations activities took place that qualified them to be called churches.

These churches, however, were not self-serving congregations but bases from where the cities were to be reached. Hence, there appears to have been some collaborative effort among several churches of any one city, necessitating what seems to have been at least a two-form organization. While each house church was authentic by itself, the whole church in a city would come together on occasion. All of this organization must have required a level of leadership to promote the health of the churches.

The house church appears to have been a success because architecturally, sociologically, and missiologically it had come into its own. The architectural limitation imposed on congregational size did not seem to be a problem because the household seems to have been a viable unit of social organization. Indeed, the sociocultural situation provided by the oikos concept seemed to have provided a good sociological fit for the house church that potentially served as a catalyst for mission.

Historical Foundation

Though there is a lot we do not know about the early church, we can learn a lot from the New Testament, especially the letters of Paul. Paul uses the word ekklesia, which from pre-Christian days meant any gathering of a group of people, to refer to a gathering of people before God. The gatherings were usually small; probably thirty members on average, and the people often belonged to the same household or guild.

Sometimes several such groups met together, but this was probably rare before the third century, when special buildings for Christian worship began to be constructed.[42]

Small groups of Christians met regularly (weekly or perhaps monthly) for worship, encouragement, and instruction as early as the first decades of Christianity, but it is not quite accurate to call them small groups in the contemporary sense. These groups didn't think of themselves as the more personal, relational aspect of a larger church, as many small groups do now—they were the only church that members knew.

For centuries after the establishment of church buildings, religious activity among laypeople tended to be centered in the local church and the home. (Monastic groups constitute another type of spiritual community, but because of the time and lifestyle commitments required, the monastic experience is fundamentally different from any modern small group.) Low literacy and a lack of access to the Scriptures discouraged the formation of Bible study groups, and sometimes clergy discouraged it as well, fearing sectarianism and unorthodox teaching. Martin Luther and John Calvin strongly encouraged teaching and discipleship in the home but they did not advocate anything quite like modern interfamily, often mono-generational, small groups.[43]

In the seventeenth century, Pietists on the European continent and Dissenters in Britain revived the house church ideal in contrast to state churches (Lutheran, Reformed, and Anglican) that they considered spiritually dead. John Wesley, who had contact with Pietists and Dissenters, encouraged all Methodists to meet in groups outside of their local church, even though such meetings could lead to persecution. But Wesley also expected

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[42]Elesha Coffman, "Where Did Small Groups Start," accessed May 2012, http://www.christianity today.com/ch/asktheexpert/aug31.html.

[43]Ibid.

Methodists to keep attending Anglican churches, as he did. He's perhaps the first to think of small group participation as an addition to regular church attendance, not a replacement for it.[44]

From the very beginning of creation, God has existed in triune community. Although the Trinity is not explicitly stated in the Bible, it is implied throughout all Scripture (Gn 1:1-2, 26; Lk 1:35-37; Jn 14:16-26; Jn 17; and Rev 1:4-6, for example). We vividly observe the action between the three persons of God: God the Father, the One who sustains and from whom we derive our purpose; God the Son, the One and Only Redeemer of mankind; and God the Holy Spirit, the One who enlightens, comforts, and sanctifies.[45] The three persons of one Holy God are entwined throughout creation and the fall, and are at the very heart of the plan of redemption through Jesus' victory over death. A triune God, the oneness of Deity and the plurality of Persons, interdependent relationships, offers the hope we have today.

God's Word is a timeless truth. As we come together in our small groups, we should strive to know the love of God the Father, the heartbeat of Jesus, God in the flesh, and the power of God's enabling Spirit. We should yearn to be imitators of God, longing for life-transformation through spiritual renewal.

Think about Noah and his group of seven. The Lord grieved over the wickedness on the earth and his heart was filled with pain (Gn 6:5-6). But Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time and he walked with God. Noah and his three sons found favor with the Lord, and our mighty, loving God chose these men and their wives to renew his creation. They existed in cramped quarters with numerous animals, bridging

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[44]Ibid.

[45]Ibid.

their unique characteristics and environments, and waited for the moment God would release them from the high waters to the drying soil.[46]

Popular songs and verses most often paint the picture of forty agonizing rainy days within the confines of this dwelling, with a few carefully selected animals two by two. Upon careful study, one realizes that in fact it was about a year and four months, and many more animals than the examples of wooden ark masterpieces would suggest. Nevertheless, this was a chosen community—a small group strategically placed on the earth for God's perfect purposes; a community that would lead to the rise of God's people.[47]

There is nothing like the excitement new believers discover when they sense friends who care deeply for them surround them. In fact, healthy Christian faith instills a powerful desire to be with other believers in worship, fellowship, and just learning about the things of God. Meeting together offers Christian's opportunities to be renewed in worship, enriched in fellowship, and challenged to explore their new faith.

Whether you are a part of a mega congregation or a smaller one, there is an important next step that offers promise for shaping and enriching your faith. Some churches call them small groups. Interestingly enough, the history of small groups goes back to Jesus and the disciples. It was John Wesley, however, who gave the world one of the most effective models of this endeavor. While some aspects of Christianity have become privatized, individualistic, and lacking accountability, it is also true that

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[46]Ibid.

[47]Ibid.

participating in intimate groups, where people share their lives and faith, runs counter to such trends.[48]

Being a believer requires community and fellowship. We cannot live as if we are alone on an island and be a Christian, since faith is always communal. One aspect of our faith formation is participating in spiritual accountability groups. Wesley believed that there is *no personal holiness without social holiness.*[49]

For Wesley, living holy lives required believers to share their lives in intimate fellowship on a regular basis. His development of small groups revolutionized 18th century England and provided a framework to help people grow in holiness of heart and life. Small groups provided a context in which seekers could receive support, accountability, and encouragement. This was especially important considering the evils of society and the disarray of the culture. Wesley's system of mutual accountability was divided into three formative aspects: societies, classes, and bands.[50]

Societies primarily focused on educational channels through which the tenets of Methodism were presented. These tenets were taught in a large classroom setting primarily through lecture, preaching, public reading, hymn singing, and exhorting. In societies, people sat in rows, women and men separated, where they listened to a prepared lecture. They were not given opportunity to respond or give feedback.
In societies leaders taught key Methodist doctrines: 1) The perfectibility of humanity vs. Reformed and Calvinistic views of human depravity; 2) The freedom of the human will

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[48]Mark A. Maddix, John Wesley's Small Groups: Models of Christian Community, accessed March 2013, http://www.ncnnews.com/nphweb/html/ht/article.jsp?id=10008759.

[49]Ibid.

[50]Ibid.

vs. theological determinism and 3) True religion manifested in human relationships vs. the mystics, who emphasized inner contemplation as the way to spiritual growth.[51]

John and Charles Wesley led the societies until the movement expanded and lay assistants were delegated to oversee them in the absence of ordained clergy. The major aim was to present scriptural truths and have those truths clearly understood. *Class Meetings* were the most influential instructional unit in Methodism and probably Wesley's greatest contribution to spiritual growth. Class meetings get so much credit because they radically transformed England's working masses. The success centered on the instructional design of behavioral change.[52]

Classes were intimate gatherings of ten or twelve people who met weekly for personal supervision of their spiritual growth. *Rules for the United Societies* were the primary framework for the class meetings. *Rules* specified the basic process of inquiry as to the subject matter of how their souls prospered.

Class meetings were coeducational experiences that included women in leadership. Included in the sessions were those of diverse age, social standing, and spiritual readiness. Wesley wanted the classes to represent a cross section of Methodism. Also, the classes provided a place for believers to accept people from various social backgrounds. This helped break up the rigid class standards of 18th century England. The leaders would share honestly about their failures, sins, temptations, or inner battles. They

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[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid.

were the role models for others. Class meetings revolved around personal experience, not doctrine or biblical information. Perfect love was the goal of the class meetings.[53]

Leaders were fellow strugglers who started the meeting, provided spiritual oversight or pastoral care to others-a sub-pastor in the Methodist organizational framework-and were to carry the concerns of the class throughout the week. Leaders created an atmosphere of trust for all members to bear all things. Class meetings provided community and the development of class relationship and spiritual accountability for those who were struggling with habitual issues. It was a place that provided support, encouragement, and spiritual maturation as Methodists sought to live holy lives.[54]

Bands facilitated affective redirection. Unlike the class meeting, the band was a homogenous grouping by gender, age, and marital status. Bands were voluntary cells of people who professed a clear Christian faith and who desired to grow in love, holiness, and purity of intention. Bands included ruthless honesty and frank openness. Members sought to improve their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions, and affections.[55]

A central function of the band was what Wesley termed "close conversation." By this term he meant soul-searching examination, not so much of behavior and ideas, but of motive and heartfelt impressions. Certainly we cannot replicate Wesley's process completely, but we can transmit the important principles into our local congregations. Gathering in groups for spiritual accountability can help foster our faith and help us grow

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[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid.

[55]Ibid.

in Christlikeness. Being a faithful follower of Christ requires our investment in the journey of others.[56]

Wesley provides a holistic approach to Christian formation, something that we can adapt in a Western individualistic culture. We are reminded of Wesley's admonition; there is no holiness without social holiness.[57]

Theological Foundation

The theological foundations will provide an overview of Black and liberation theology. It will chronicle the historical evolution of Black and liberation theology and its effect on the African American family, community and church.

Liberation Theology is concerned with the freedom and dignity of those who are oppressed. James Cone argues that Blacks have historically been the oppressed in America. He further argues that Blacks need freedom from white oppressors.[58] The concern here is not about racial hatred but freedom from oppression. Liberation theology emphasizes that God is on the side of freedom and not oppression. Blackness in James H. Cone's thought is not just a racial issue but also the object of oppression. "Black theology is a theology of liberation because it is a theology which arises from identification with the oppressed Blacks in America seeking to interpret the gospel of Jesus in the light of the Black condition. It believes that the liberation of the Black community is God's liberation."[59]

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[56]Ibid.

[57]Ibid.

[58]James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 1.

[59]Ibid., 5.

The freedom sought for by Blacks is a freedom from oppression and a freedom to be themselves. This freedom is God given. Providing ministry opportunities and encouragement for African American males in church life is liberating. Opportunity and encouragement can promote empowerment. Process theology helps to explain this empowerment. "Process theologians influenced by the philosophy of A. N. Whitehead and C. Hartshorne proposed a new doctrine of God that stressed the divine immanence, the divine involvement in the world process, the divine responsiveness, and the divine love as persuasive rather than coercive. In this way, they showed God's immediacy and presence in every moment, and God's effect on the moment."[60]

African-American males are empowered for ministry when they are loved, supported, encouraged and believed in and provided with opportunities for ministry. "The process theologians see God as active in all events as one efficient cause among many others. According to the process view, God acts in the world by influence and persuasion."[61] God uses all of our experiences, good and bad, to bring to reality our best selves. It takes all that we have gone through to get where we are.

According to William L. Banks, Black liberation theology supports the concept of prophetic preaching affecting attitudinal change toward transformation. Banks states that Black liberation theology began to take root during the time of slavery in America.[62] At that time, most Blacks accepted the *slave brand* of Christianity on face value. White missionaries persuaded Blacks that life on earth was insignificant because obedient

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[60]Thomas C. Owen and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing: New York, 2002, 89.

[61]Ibid., 128.

[62]William L. Banks, *Black Church in the U.S.* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1972), 12.

servants of God could expect a reward in heaven after death. The white interpretation of Christianity effectively divested the slaves of any concern that they might have had about their freedom in the present.

Robert McAfee Brown in *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide,* articulates three emphases of liberation theology which cannot be separated. "The first emphasis is liberation from unjust social structures that destroy people. The structures may be political or economic or cultural; they may grow out of warped attitudes based on race, class, national, sex or religious structures. The second emphasis is liberation from the power of fate, from the sense that one's station in life is foreordained. The third emphasis is liberation from personal sin and guilt."[63] All three of these emphases are a part of and essential to liberation theology. The focus of the project is more on the first emphasis of liberation from unjust social structures but the other two emphases are not excluded.

Much of James Cone's work lays the foundation for prophetic preaching as a means to liberate individuals from crisis. Cone states that as more Blacks began attending white Christian churches, restrictions in seating, communion services, and property ownership caused many Blacks to seek autonomy in their own congregations and ultimately, separate denominations.[64] By the mid-1700's, Black slaves had begun meeting in private to worship since authentic worship with whites was impossible. There is historical evidence to conclude that these themes later developed by Black liberation theologians were present in these early slave meetings in at least a nascent form.[65]

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[63]Robert McAfee Brown, *Liberation Theology: An Introductory Guide.* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1993, 61-63.

[64]James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1969), 121.

[65]Ibid.

Emmanuel McCall notes the impact of an activism form of prophetic preaching to deliver people who found themselves in crisis. According to McCall, it was not long before slave theology would give rise to Black activism.[66] There were many important figures who contributed to the cause of Black liberation throughout Black history. Among them were Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey, Howard Thurman, Martin Luther King Jr., and Albert Cleage.

Eric C. Lincoln makes the argument that prophetic preaching must be relevant to truly liberate individuals from crisis. Lincoln states that Black liberation theology as expressed in the African American community seeks to find a way to make the gospel relevant to Black people who must struggle daily under the burden of white oppression.[67] The question often posed to Black theologians is not one that is easily answered. "What if anything does the Christian gospel have to say to powerless Black men," to use James Cone's words, whose existence is "threatened on a daily basis by the insidious tentacles of white power?"[68] If the gospel has nothing to say to people as they confront the daily realities of life, it is a lifeless message. If Christianity is not real to Blacks, then they will reject it.

According to Anthony T. Evans, prophetic preaching must also be real to facilitate one's deliverance from crisis. Evans states that there are many reasons why

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[66]Emmanuel McCall, *Black Liberation Theology: A Politics of Freedom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 352.

[67]Lincoln, Eric C. "The Development of Black Religion in America," *Review and Expositor 70* (Summer 1973), 12.

[68]Ibid.

Christianity has not been real to Blacks.[69] To begin with, white Christianity emphasizes individualism, and divides the world into separate realms of the sacred and secular, public and private. Such a view of the world is alien to African-American spirituality. The Christianity that was communicated to Blacks had as its primary focus life in the present world. In addition, Christianity is hopelessly associated with slavery and segregation in the minds of many African-Americans.

Wilmore and Cone argue that an individual has come out of crisis when their ethics are consistently changed. According to Wilmore and Cone, there were also many reasons to believe that many African Americans previously rejected Christianity.[70] The historical presence of Islam in the African-American community was nurtured by a variety of forces, but one of its principle sources of strength was the sense that within many blacks a tremendous gap existed between what took place in the Church on Sunday, and how church people lived during the rest of the week.[71] Many converts to Islam were Christian, but they testified to seeing little coherence between the worship of the church, and the rough and tumble world of the streets the rest of the week.[72]

According to Lincoln, James Cone is known as the father of Black liberation theology.[73] McCall reveals that James Cone was born in Fordyce, Arkansas in 1939 and

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[69]Anthony T. Evans, *Biblical Theology and the Black Experience* (Dallas, TX: Black Evangelistic Enterprise, 1977), 19.

[70]Gayraud S. Wilmore and James H. Cone, *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (New York, NY: Orbis Press, 1979), 116-117.

[71]Ibid.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Lincoln, "*Development of Black Religion in America,*" 12.

grew up in the small town of Bearsden.[74] It was there that Cone experienced the life-affirming community of the Black Church alongside the soul-crushing reality of white racism. Through sermons, songs, and prayers that called on God's concern for their well-being, the Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church taught Cone how to deal with the contradictions of life and present a way to create meaning in a society not of his own making.[75]

In response to criticism from other Black theologians, Cone began to make greater use of resources native to the African American Christian community for his theological work, including slave spirituals, the blues, and the writings of prominent African American thinkers like David Walker, Henry McNeal, and W. E. B. DuBois.[76]

Gayraud Wilmore prescribes a theology focused on liberation of people from crisis. Wilmore's theology emphasizes black self-affirmation with the understanding that God wills Black people to be free, equal, and at peace.[77] According to Wilmore, Black theology should enable Blacks to stop victimizing each other, such as through Black-on-Black crime, or perpetuating the poor self-esteem engendered through several years of living in a racist society.[78]Black theology should be the method of analyzing the gospel's concern with breaking the chains of oppression. Theory and practice should join hands to help counter oppression and injustice.[79]

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[74]McCall, 352.

[75]Ibid., 352.

[76]Wilmore and Cone, 117.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Ibid.

[79]Ibid.

Cone refers to Black liberation theology as an attempt to teach people how to be both unapologetically Black and Christian at the same time.[80] Cone in his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, also develops Black theology as a system. Cone's formulation is that Christian theology is a theology of liberation— "a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of the oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ." Black consciousness and the Black experience of oppression orient Black liberation theology.[81]

According to Barbara Hagerty, Black liberation theology originated on July 31, 1966, when 51 black pastors bought a full-page ad in the New York Times and demanded a more aggressive approach to eradicating racism.[82] These pastors echoed the demands of the black power movement, but the new crusade found its source of inspiration in the Bible.[83] Anthony Pinn, who teaches philosophy and religion at Rice University in Houston states, "God's presence in the world is best depicted through God's involvement in the struggle for justice."[84] Pinn further states, "God is so intimately connected to the community that suffers that God becomes part of that community."[85]

Anthony Bradley points out that a clear definition of Black theology was first given formulation in 1969 by the National Committee of Black Church Men in the midst

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[80]Evans, 21.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Lincoln, 15.

[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid.

of the civil rights movement.[86] Black theology is a theology of liberation from crisis. It seeks to plumb the Black condition in light of God's revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the Black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievements of Black humanity.[87] Black theology is a theology of blackness. It is the affirmation of Black humanity that emancipates Black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and Black people.[88] It affirms the humanity of white people in that it says *No* to the encroachment of white oppression.[89]

The notion of *blackness* is not merely a reference to skin color, but rather it is a symbol of oppression that can be applied to all persons of color who have a history of oppression.[90] In his book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, Cone states, "Being Black in America has little to do with skin color. Being Black means that your heart, your soul, your mind, and your body are where the dispossessed are."[91] In 1977, Cone was quoted as saying, "I think the time has come for Black theologians and church people to move beyond a mere reaction to white racism in America and begin to extend our vision of a new socially constructed humanity in the whole inhabited world. Wilmore and Cone argue that humanity is whole, and cannot be isolated into racial and national groups."[92]

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[86]McCall, 353.

[87]Ibid.

[88]Ibid.

[89]Ibid.

[90]James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1975), 3.

[91]Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 127.

[92]Wilmore and Cone, 118.

Dwight Hopkins, a professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School, says that Black liberation theology often portrays Jesus as a brown-skinned revolutionary.[93] Hopkins cites the words of Mary in the Magnificat—also known as the *Song of Mary*—in which she says God intends to bring down the mighty and to raise the lowly. Hopkins also notes that in the book of Matthew, Jesus says the path to heaven is to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners.[94] The central text for Black liberation theology can be found in chapter 4 of Luke's gospel, where Jesus outlines the purpose of his ministry.

Hopkins further states, "Jesus says my mission is to eradicate poverty and to bring about freedom and liberation for the oppressed."[95] Most Christian pastors in America skip over that part of the Bible. Linda Thomas, who teaches at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago, says the whole point of it is to challenge the powerful and to raise questions for society to think about.[96]

Cone makes the line of argument with a force that cuts to the marrow of contemporary American Christianity: "Jesus had little toleration for the middle-or-upper-class religious snob whose attitude attempted to usurp the sovereignty of God and destroy the dignity of the poor."[97] Cone further writes, "The Kingdom is not for the poor and not for the rich because the former has nothing to expect from the world while the latter's

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[93]Ibid.

[94]Ibid.

[95]Ibid.

[96]Ibid.

[97]Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, 3.

entire existence is grounded in his commitment to worldly things.[98] The poor man may expect everything from God, while the rich man may expect nothing because he refuses to free himself from his own pride. It is not that poverty is a pre-condition for entrance into the Kingdom.[99] However, those who recognize their utter dependence on God, and wait on Him despite the fact that miserable absurdity of life is typically poor, according to Jesus." When Black people hear this message, Cone insists, they discover a message that resonates with their experience of life.[100] Their experience of struggling for liberation is the same as the struggle of Christ himself. Jesus, who was resurrected, is now alive and therefore, fighting for the very same things, working against the structures of injustice.[101]

The goal of Black liberation theology is freedom and justice. Lincoln explains that Black theologians turn to scripture as the sanction for their demand.[102] The psalmist writes, "If God is going to see righteousness established in the land, he himself must be particularly active as the helper of the fatherless to deliver the needy when he crieth; and the poor that hath no helper."[103] Karl Barth, who was not Black—recognized the legitimacy of this demand.[104] For this reason, Barth wrote, "in the relations and events in the life of His people, God always takes His stand unconditionally and passionately on

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[98]Ibid.

[99]Ibid.

[100]Ibid.

[101]Ibid.

[102]Lincoln, 15.

[103]Ps 72:12.

[104]Lincoln, 15.

this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it."[105] Barth believed that man brought the divine under his possession and under his own management. Barth's ideology becomes a foundation for all liberation theology.[106] Liberation theology then, seeks to wrestle God away from the oppressors and make Him to be what the Word of God describes Him to be, against oppressors and an unconditional liberator of oppressed peoples.

Millard Erickson states that Black liberation theologians do not intend to allow the church —whether it is white or Black—to evade its responsibility.[107] It "cannot say that the poor are in poverty because they will not work, or that they suffer because they are lazy. However, having come before God as nothing and being received by Him into His kingdom through grace, the Christian should know that he or she has been made righteous (justified) so that he or she can join God in the fight for justice.[108] Therefore, whoever fights for the poor, fights for God; whoever risks his or her life for the helpless and unwanted, risks their life for God.[109]

Cone writes, "Authentic love is not help, not giving away Christmas baskets, but working for political, social, and economic justice, which always means a distribution of

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[105]Ibid., 15-16.

[106]Ibid., 16.

[107]Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 543.

[108]Ibid.

[109]Ibid.

power."[110] It is the kind of power which enables Blacks to fight their own battles and thus to keep their dignity.[111]

As part of his theological analysis, Cone argues for God's own identification with *blackness.*[112] "The Black theologian must reject any conception of God which stifles Black self-determination by picturing God as a God of all people. Either God is identified with the oppressed to the point that their experience becomes God's experience, or God is a God of racism.[113] The blackness of God means that God has made the oppressed condition God's own condition. This is the essence of the biblical revelation. By electing Israelite slaves as the people of God and by becoming the Oppressed One in Jesus Christ, the human race is made to understand that God is known where human beings experience humiliation and suffering.[114] According to Cone, liberation is not an afterthought, but the very essence of divine activity.[115]

Cone's interpretation of Scripture is consistent with the concept of liberation from crisis. Having established that the Black experience is the governing principle in Cone's interpretation of Scripture, it is important to note how this governing principle affects Cone's view of specific doctrine.[116] Cone views God from the stance of God's deliverance of Israel from oppression under the Egyptians. Cone says that the consistent

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[110]Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 142.

[111]Ibid.

[112]Ibid.

[113]Ibid.

[114]Ibid.

[115]James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia, PA: J. P. Lippenscott Publishing, 1970), 63-64.

[116]Ibid., 22.

theme in Israelite prophecy is Yahweh's concern for "the lack of social, economic, and political justice for those who are poor and unwanted in the society.[117] Cone argues that it is the same God, who is working for the deliverance of oppressed blacks in twentieth-century America.[118] His belief is that because God is helping oppressed Blacks and has identified with them, God Himself is spoken of as *Black.*

Cone suggests that the doctrine of Jesus Christ is one of deliverance of people from crisis. On the doctrine of Jesus Christ, Cone's intention is to stand in the Chalcedonian tradition in his understanding of Jesus Christ.[119] The Chalcedonian creed affirmed that Christ is truly God and truly man. Cone agrees, but adds that the role of Jesus as God-Incarnate was to liberate the oppressed.[120] In *Theology* by Cone, he is quoted as follows: "Jesus Christ is God Himself coming into the very depths of human existence for the sole purpose of striking off the chains of slavery, thereby freeing man from ungodly principalities and powers that hinder his relationship with God.[121]

In Cone's view, sin is a condition of human existence in which man denies the essence of God's liberating activity as revealed in Jesus Christ.[122] In this view, sin is anything that is contrary to the oppressed community or its liberation.

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[117]Ibid.

[118]Ibid.

[119]Ibid.

[120]Ibid.

[121]Ibid.

[122]Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 190.

Cone believes that the Black church has played an instrumental role in the religious and social life of Black America.[123] Cone says that the Black church was the creation of a Black people "whose daily existence was an encounter with the overwhelming and brutalizing reality of white power.[124]For the slaves, the Black church was the sole source of identity and the sense of community. The Black church became the only sphere of Black experience that was free of white power.[125]

Cone further argues the idea of people coming out of crisis as a present and future reality. According to the doctrine of eschatology, Cone rejects the idea that Christianity is primarily concerned with life in the next world.[126] Cone states that if eschatology means that one believes that God is totally uninvolved in the suffering of man because he is preparing them for another world, then Black theology is not eschatological.[127] Black theology, according to Cone, has hope for this life. Cone's definitions of revolution and violence are quite radical. [128] Cone defines liberation as the "any means of emancipation that Black people deemed necessary." This definition would seem to allow for the use of violence.[129]

Roberts suggest that the individuals must take action beyond liberation from crisis. DeOtis Roberts argues that a biblical theology of liberation must include an emphasis on

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[123]Ibid., 109.

[124]Ibid.

[125]Ibid.

[126]Ibid., 123.

[127]Ibid.

[128]Ibid.

[129]Ibid.

reconciliation among men, without which the theology ceases to be Christian.[130] Black liberation theologian DeOtis Roberts insists that Black theology must speak of reconciliation that brings Black men together and of reconciliation that brings Black and white men together.[131] Roberts says that it is his true belief that true freedom overcomes estrangement and heals the brokenness between people. However, Roberts argues that reconciliation can take place only between equals. The concept cannot exist with a situation of Whites over Blacks.[132]

The idea of liberation theology and the Black church raises an important question to be considered.[133] How influential has black liberation theology been in the life of the Black church in America? C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya completed a ten-year statistical study of the black church in America.[134] Younger and more educated pastors responded as being more influenced by black liberation theology than older and less educated pastors. The study also noted that higher education levels among denominations such as the African American Episcopal Church were more involved in the Black liberation movement.[135] This study also suggests that the Black liberation movement has not as readily affected lower-class individuals.

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[130]DeOtis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1971), 152.

[131]Ibid.

[132]Ibid.

[133]C. Eric Lincoln, *Black Experience in Religion: Rev. ed.*(New York, NY: Anchor Press, 1990), 139.

[134]Ibid.

[135]Ibid.

Based on their nationwide field experience, Lincoln and Mamiya have observed that the majority of black clergy are educated as apprentices—learning *on the job* under the direction of senior clergy.[136] What little academic education that clergy receive is usually at the Bible school level. Most of the reading is denominationally oriented. It is this local level of clergy education, Lincoln and Mamiya suggest that new Back liberation theology has thus far failed to penetrate.[137]

Lincoln and Mamiya make the following warning: "Unless the movement of Black liberation theology reaches beyond its present location among the intellectual elite and gives more attention to a mass education of clergy and laity in the churches, the movement will continue to have minimal influence among its key constituencies."[138]

Skinner makes the argument that people come out of crisis with an assurance of the power of God. Skinner states that Black people expect the preacher to reassure them of God's power, not to question or doubt it.[139] The Black church expects the pastor to help with joblessness, poverty, and discrimination by transforming their despair into hope. Black theology needs to provide the content and method of changing the social, economic, and political obstacles for Blacks.[140] The Black church needs a practical theology that can help liberate it from social, political, and economic oppression.[141]

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[136]Ibid.

[137]Ibid., 144.

[138]Ibid., 144-145.

[139]Tom Skinner, *If Christ is the Answer, What are the Questions?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 112-113.

[140]Ibid., 113.

[141]Ibid.

In John Jasper's characteristic hermeneutic, LaRue indicates that God acts mightily as liberator and defender.[142] LaRue deals with the domain of the "care of the soul" by reiterating Alexander Crummell's hermeneutic of a God who acts mightily. [143] Within Crummell's reference, LaRue notes that history moves under the power of God with purpose and design.[144] God is sovereign over all nations of the earth and that whatever a nation becomes, both corporately and individually, depends upon its character and obedience to almighty God.[145]

The idea of liberation is emphasized in the New Testament by Jesus Christ. In Luke 4:18-19, Jesus clearly sounded the note of liberation for oppressed persons. His emphasis was not just a spiritual liberation but also included liberation from physical oppression.[146]

The God of the Hebrews and the God of Jesus was and is a liberating God who is active in the world to set the enslaved and captives free. God takes upon God's self the condition of oppression. The human situation of physical and spiritual bondage became God's plight with God's people. "The search for Black identity is the search for God, because God's identity is revealed in the Black struggle for freedom."[147] Human freedom

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[142]Cleophus LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 35.

[143]Ibid., 36.

[144]Ibid.

[145]Ibid.

[146]Ibid., 3.

[147]Ibid., 15.

and identity belong together. Persons of faith are free inwardly and sincerely committed to God. Freedom is the inevitable yearning.

"Men belong to God, and no man who is in bondage to another is free to answer God if he must first answer to some other man claiming to be his master."[148] Freedom is essential for human dignity. A person is defined by his or her commitments; but, without freedom, commitments are shallow or cannot be realized.

C. Eric Lincoln implied that the reality of Black theology did not begin with James H. Cone. "Black theology began with the first sermon preached by a Black slave to his brothers and sisters huddled together in some plantation swamp or forest. … it was even then a theology of liberation because it questioned the established contention that God willed the desecration of the human spirit by reducing a man to a thing."[149] Black theology helped to shape an identity of positiveness and empowerment for African Americans throughout their history in America. When the broader society labeled blackness as ugly, Black theology declared that blackness was beautiful because God is the creator.

Black theology takes the suffering of the oppressed seriously. Suffering is embraced with the hope of liberation. In the spirit of Black theology, the African American Church has been prophetic in calling the status quo into question. The African American church offers understanding to the struggles of the African American male and the hopeful message of empowerment. The positive message of liberating hope empowers, encourages and enables males to be positive and productive members of the

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[148]Eric C. Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1974), 147.

[149]Lincoln, *The Black Church Since Frazier*, 147.

African American church community. Black theology affirms "to know God is to know God's work of liberation on behalf of the oppressed."[150]

Knowledge of God is reflected in one's life and activities inspired by God. A person's love and knowledge of God provides identity and influences behavior. Faith in God is bigger than the struggles and difficulties faced. The African American Church is the custodian of hope for African Americans. African American males are empowered by Black theology through the African American church. The church provides for these males, empowerment and purpose often denied by the broader culture. In *Soul Theology,* religion and belief systems are acknowledged for having great importance. "Among oppressed people and all others under major stress, belief systems give healing and empowering support to psychic and spiritual survival. The belief system of Black culture has been doing just this task."[151] African Americans in general and African American males in particular owe their survival and positiveness to their faith and/or the church. The invitation and opportunity to share in the ministry of the church says to African American males that they are needed, loved and appreciated.

The church is not a building. The church is the people of God. When the church is reduced to just being a building, the church loses its mission, focus and purpose. The church is a community of faith in Jesus Christ. The faith of these believers has a purpose in Jesus, the Christ. The mission of this community of believers is to live out being Christ's agents in setting persons free from sin, oppression and physical bondage. The church is spirit-filled, spirit-empowered and spirit-led. The church is not a selfish

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[150]Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation,* 48.

[151]Nicholas C. Cooper-Lewter, and Henry H. Mitchell, *Soul Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), xi.

community. The church is God's community. For African Americans the church cannot neglect being the liberating agent.

J. Deotis Roberts emphasizes the idea of family for the African American church. "The Black church, as a social and religious body, has served as a kind of 'extended family' for Blacks. In a real sense, then, thousands of Blacks who have never known real family life have discovered the meaning of real kinship in the Black church."[152] Historically, family life was either denied or limited severely for African Americans. Family is the social unit where a person is loved, respected, appreciated, valued, recognized, and supported. The African American church is the family. It provided all of the missing family elements. Church is about relationships, fatherhood, motherhood, brotherhood and sisterhood. Church relationships are often stronger than biological relationships because church relationships are undergirded by a common faith along with deep friendship with each other.

E. Franklin Frazier in *The Negro Church in America* describes the loss of family life.

> The enslavement of the Negro not only destroyed the traditional African system of kinship and other forms of organized social life but it made insecure and precarious the most elementary form of social life which tended to sprout anew, so to speak, on American soil—the family. There was, or course, no legal marriage and the relation of the husband and father to his wife and children was a temporary relationship dependent upon the will of the white masters and the exigencies of the plantation regime."[153]

The African American church was forced to form a system of kinship and family to fill the void of a lack of family life. These family relationships were and are essential

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[152]Deotis J. Roberts, ed. David Emmanuel Goatley, *Black Religion, Black Theology: The Collected Essays of J. Deotis Roberts* (Harrisbury, Trinity Press International, 03), 78.

[153]E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Church in America* (New York: NY: Schocken Books, 1974), 13.

to a person's well-being. The church for African Americans had to and continues to attend to family support systems and issues that the white church never had to focus upon. For African Americans, the church was not just a home away from home. The church was and is home. It provides warmth, love, support and real kinship. The African American church lives into the idea that *God is a mother for the motherless and a father for the fatherless.* The church literally lives into the reality that it will provide real kinship even when that kinship has been denied or loss. The church seeks to be a real family of faith and kinship. Human beings belong to God. God will use the church or other means to meet the needs of God's people. Black Theology declares that God is interested in the liberation of people held in bondage. African American males need a sense of kinship and family in a society where they are viewed negatively and are stereotyped as lazy, worthless, irresponsible, and the very scum of America. The church declares to African American males that they do count and that they are members of a family that cares for them. They are encouraged to be all they can be in the *Body of Christ.* The identity of African American males is appreciated above and beyond the negative stereotypes. It is liberating to be appreciated and acknowledged as a person of sacred worth when the broader society has sentenced African American males to a destiny of *insignificant person status*. To be able to say *we are family* is to say *I am important*. I am more than what others say or will. I am God's child. Everybody is unique, special and blessed in the family of God.

J. Deotis Roberts recognizes the importance of the significance of the church being a family. "The church as a good family is a fellowship in which every member is *somebody*. It has always been a place where Blacks who have been *nobodies* through the

week have affirmed their dignity as persons. Among members of the body of Christ there is to be togetherness, belongingness, but the dignity of selfhood is to be respected and cultivated."[154] Roberts further points out that out of this climate of love and appreciation, leaders are developed. Along with leaders produced, persons who have done extremely well in secular vocations have been nurtured and supported by the Black church.[155] The African American church has been the community of faith, the family of hope and the inspirer of dreams for a people who have been denied or robbed of positive identity. The African American church exemplifies the idea that people become what they are taught, dream and are committed to. The blessedness and success of the African American church cannot be limited to the institutional aspects of the church. A more realistic assessment of the importance of the church has to be seen in what happens in the lives of African Americans.

African Americans have been inspired by the Christian faith as the church has provided an outlet where their faith can be lived and shared. "Existentially, this Black Christian outlook informed how African Americans understood themselves, others and the world around them. The personal experiences of conversion enabled otherwise degraded individuals to see themselves as worthwhile and precious in God's sight. This sense of self-worth was fortified by the religious rhetoric's used in the construction of a communal identity. African Americans, through biblical analogy, came to see themselves as the children of God, linking as it were the freedom of the Israelites with their own

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[154]Roberts, *Black Religion, Black Theology,* 81.

[155]Ibid., 81.

eventual liberation."[156] Conversion was personal and communal for African Americans. It was individual and shared experiences. Self-worth had deeper and more intense meaning in a community of love, support, kinship and encouragement. Self-worth in and of itself is liberation when viewed against the background of slavery, racism, insult and degradation.

"The 'Black church' (whether the invisible institution of the south or the Black churches and denomination of the North) was the principle site of public engagement for African Americans. Here Black individuals could participate directly in deliberation about their circumstances with public humiliation from white Americans. The church also housed numerous activities from schools to social functions."[157] The African American church was the only institution and place where African Americans were free enough to discuss and share their real feelings about their own situation and their yearning for freedom. The church was the only place where African Americans could be who they really were and call into question racial inconsistencies and the white status quo. Black liberation theology could take place in the freedom provided within the African American church. The church had to take seriously the suffering and oppression of African Americans. Black liberation theology declares that suffering and oppression cannot be neglected or ignored.

Dwight N. Hopkins makes a key point in regard to the inner aspect of Black theology. "… a liberation movement needs to free Black minds from self-hate and

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[156]Cornel West and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr, *African American Religious Thought: An Anthology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), xxi.

[157]Ibid., xxii.

subordination to white power."[158] The church is essential in helping to set African Americans free internally empowering them to be positive in external actions.

Black liberation theology is centered in God's desire for human freedom. "God becomes everything that the people need in order to sustain their lives with dignity. God is the One that the people can tell all about their troubles."[159] Every aspect of a person or people's relationship with God is liberating because God is a God of liberation. People cannot worship, pray; sing or fellowship with God without being involved and set free by God's liberating activity in the world.

Liberation theology is positive for the oppressed and the oppressors. "This struggle for 'full humanity' both demonstrate and restores human dignity, not only for the oppressed but also for the oppressor, whose humanity is diminished by participation in and collusion with domination."[160] God's liberation makes the lives of all of God's children more God-like and suitable to live in community.

J. Deotis Roberts wrote in *The Prophethood of Black Believers* that "It is time for all Black people to become concerned and get involved. We must seek to preserve our communal life. Rugged individualism is not a luxury we can afford. Thus, the 'haves' must reach out to the 'have-nots'....We need to close the ranks and seek what we can do to lift the underclass from self-destruction and total ruin. We must not have our success at

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[158]Dwight Hopkins, *Introducing Black Theology of Liberation* (Mary Knoll, NY: Orbis Books 2008), 5.

[159]James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 1977), 132.

[160]Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 134.

their expense."[161] The church has the responsibility to call into question selfish individualism and the destructive division that it leads to. Unity among the faithful of the church should not be sacrificed to satisfy egotistical desires which will leave us lonely and alone. African American church members are responsible to bless and be a blessing to those in need. "Black churches cannot afford to be 'class' churches. The spirit of the early church of Acts should be manifest in our midst. Black churches need to be sharing and caring fellowships."[162] The African American church must continue to be an agent of liberation in service to the God of Liberation.

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[161]J. Deotis Roberts, *The Prophpethood of Black Believers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1994), 23.

[162]Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

The context for this research project is Friendship Community Church in collaboration with Stonewall Manor Subdivision located in College Park, Georgia. The African American church generally and the Stonewall Manor Subdivision specifically has had a significant decrease in male presence and participation; a dilemma many African American churches are facing. In fact, as of the writing of the project document, nationwide church worship attendance among African American males was only 25%.

In order to test the hypothesis that posits, if an effort were made to engage men from the community through small group study, they would come to church, a series of Bible studies and male gatherings were scheduled for men who were not currently attending church services in any specific congregation.

Initial Men's Gathering

The initial men's gathering allowed the writer to greet the participants prior to engaging them in the field research. Male pleasing food, jazz, sports programming, and a club-like atmosphere, complete with women hostesses created the ambiance for the initial gathering. At this gathering, the title of the project, the hypothesis and the methodology were shared. The initial gathering gave participants the opportunity to ask clarifying questions and become familiar with the entire process before they gave a firm

commitment to the process. The overview included the Bible studies that would be taught and how they would participate in male bonding exercises and speak easies. Examples of a pre and posttest questions were given to make the participants feel at ease about their level of involvement and how their participation would be needed.

Pre and Posttest Questionnaire

At the first speak easy, the participants were asked to complete the pre test questionnaire. The pre test questionnaire was given to determine the participants level of knowledge about the Bible, male participation and involvement in the life of the church, men's responsibility in the community and men's understanding of the role of the church in the life of their members and the community. The project's context associates administered the pre and posttest, afterwards, they were analyzed and stored.

Bible Study Series

The biblical teaching consisted of four Bible studies on the role of men in the Bible and how God used men in powerful, accountable and transforming ways. The scripture passage and theme for each Bible study were as follows:

a. 1 Timothy 5:1-8 Mission Possible: You Have No Choice

b. Psalm 1:1-6 Blessed Men

c. Genesis 1:26-27 Dominion Without Domination

d. 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 On Being Responsible

A question and answer form was provided for each Bible study to assess knowledge gained from each participant. Each participant in the Bible study was encouraged to complete a question and answer form. At the end of the Bible study series,

the forms were tabulated and analyzed by the researcher and the context associates. Response questions from each Bible study were the same.

African American Male Fellowship Speak Easies

The purpose of the male fellowship speak easies was to get men to come together around common interests, themes and issues that affected African-American men in general and men of the Stonewall Manor Subdivision specifically. Once the men felt comfortable with each other and began to establish a baseline of trust, open and candid dialogue ensued. Ultimately, they were encouraged to share their raw and uncut feelings about the church, their perceived stereotypes and if they had ever attended a church, what made them stop attending. Participants were given forms to fill out regarding items discussed in each session. The discussion topics were around these broad topic areas:

- Movies
- sports
- adventure
- sex
- cars

After the field results were tabulated, codified and analyzed, the data along with formal and informal observations, and learning from the in-depth engagement of the literature was then used to re-determine and to further develop the Bible Study and speak easy sessions. This was done with a good portion of the data being given to the context associates for ratification. The context associates help confirm that the themes discovered were accurate and they also pointed areas of weakness.

The basis for the approach and methodology for this project was based on several articles and writing about men and their absence from the church. After reading several articles and books, it became obvious that in order to get to the heart of the matter, it would make good sense to get men together to discuss the articles as well as get candid responses from them in an effort to change their opinion about church.

According to an article by Paul Coughlin entitled, *Why Some Men Don't Like Church,* Coughlin says: "Many of my readers have told me why they stopped going to church and what they would like to see in order to want to attend again. So here are the "Top 10 Reasons Why Some Men Don't Go to Church," and when they do go they spend more time checking their watches and working on their To Do lists than partaking in soul work."[1] The 10 reasons that Coughlin cite are as follows:

1. Men are told over and over to be innocent as doves, but are not shown or encouraged to be wise as serpents. This has handcuffed men in all major aspects of life, robbing them of power and strength. Jesus never said that personal piety alone will get us to the abundant he has for us, but you wouldn't know this from a typical church service. The same word for 'wise" that Jesus used can also be translated as shrewd and cunning. Jesus commends shrewd behavior as found in the Parable of the Shrewd Manager (Luke 16). We largely condemn shrewdness and think it's synonymous with criminal behavior. The church wants nice men. Jesus, according to his own words, wants shrewd ones.

2. We preach from the NGB: Nice Guy Bible (Retail Price: Your Soul). We emphasize the sweet stuff and let the tougher stuff go right on by. That sweet stuff won't save a man (or woman) from the Dark Night of The Soul, a highly mentioned phrase first written by St. John of the Cross. But the more rugged Scriptures can and do. For example, it was the book of Ecclesiastes that brought President Abraham Lincoln more solace during the Civil War than another other writing. Unfortunately the meatier and more penetrating scriptures aren't emphasized much today. As a result, much of what we label as spiritual living just isn't "real" to your average guy.

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[1]Paul Coughlin, "Why Some Men Don't Like Church" http://www.crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/why-some-men-dont-like-church-1393422.html (accessed October 19, 2011).

3. We contend that the ideal Christian man is unemotional and if married, sacrifices everything for his wife. But Jesus was anything but stoic. If we were honest, we would say that Jesus was a bad Christian man because he got angry so much. According to the latest study from the University of Virginia, this false expectation toward stoicism sets men up for divorce from women who want an emotionally engaged husband (Our upcoming book *Married But Not Engaged* takes this issue head on by showing wives of passive and unemotional husbands what they should and shouldn't do to help.) And men who sacrifice all their wants and needs for their spouse eventually bore their spouse. Following such advice increases their chances of divorce.

4. Men have been told to avoid anger at all costs, which isn't what the Bible says. They have not been shown a better way: how to properly handle this primary emotion for guys since unresolved anger can lead to depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and even impotency.

5. We promote a dangerous caricature of "gentle Jesus meek and mild," an infamous and ludicrous term penned by the late John Wesley. This dangerous caricature is as fictitious as anything you'll find in Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*. We can't blame Hollywood or the mainstream media. We can blame ourselves. This caricature has encouraged Christian men to be nice to a fault, damaging their lives and those who are under their timid care.

6. Men, compared to women, are a problem to be fixed instead of a gender to be appreciated at church. This is mighty unattractive and unbiblical. Some of these churches have also given men the unbiblical belief that women are more moral and spiritual, an intrinsically shame-filled message that is also a form of gender bigotry.

7. The church and Christian radio have failed to support a married man's need for regular sexual intimacy with his wife, which is an insult and a betrayal. We are men, not eunuchs.

8. Christian men are unintentionally encouraged to become the plaything of other men in a misguided attempt to bolster their "Christian witness." We have been turned into doormats and anvils, instead of bold hammers like the fathers of our faith. We are encouraged to worship at the altar of other people's approval. Proverbs 28:1 says that the righteous are as bold as lions. Bold men are both rare and not really welcomed at church.

9. We unintentionally create spiritual veal: overprotected children who are taught to embrace false humility and false meekness. Kids who rarely, if ever, disagree with authority, even when it's corrupt. Mild children afraid of the world because they are not shown how to live in the real world (See February's Dispatch and the story, "Suicide and the 'Nice' Christian Teen. All previous newsletters can be

> found on the Free Newsletter portion of our website). Sons and daughters who don't possess a powerful opinion or functioning will because they are deemed unChristian, which sets them up for destructive peer pressure (I deal with this tragic problem in next year's release of *Raising Good Kids in a 'Nice' World*). This list goes on. Men sense this and do not want this transformation to occur in their children. So they stay away. Sunday School too often creates nice and passive kids instead of good ones.

10. Worship music is often too sentimental for guy's tastes.[2]

In another article by Cobb Stoic Observations specifically targeted to Black men, entitled, *Why Black Men Don't Church*, the list was somewhat shorter but just as revealing. Cobb says: "It turns out that my topic has been switched. Instead of talking about black male myths, I'll be talking about something akin to a black male fact, which I can only come at from a personal angle. This fact? Black men ain't at church on Sunday, at least not with the frequency and regularity of Black women. I can only speculate as to why, but I'll give you several semi-serious reasons and excuses that Black men like me have difficulties with being in church every Sunday."[3]

> The Personal Reasons
> These are the reasons I think I share with a lot of brothers, some of them admittedly trifling, but I'm telling you honestly what goes through a mind that's in bed on a Sunday morning.
>
> You Can't Preach
> My number one reason for avoiding church is the low quality of the oration of some of the preachers out there. How many times have I heard ministers drone on and on about Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus and how we must make our own transformations and leave our prior lives behind? How many times have I heard ministers talk about their own temptations and how they were worthless sinners and skirt chasers and how all us men are dogs like they used to be? How many times have I had to sit through the junior minister stumbling or the guest pastor from out of town.

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Cobb Stoic Observations, "Why Black Men Don't Church", accessed March 2012, http://cobb.typepad.com/cobb/2006/ 09/why_black_men_d.html.

It's My Money
Yeah that's right, and guess what? God doesn't need my money. The Church needs my money. They've always needed my money and they've always tried to convince me that God wants me to give it to them. I've been praying to Jesus since I was 8 years old and never once has He told me, "can you help a brotha out?" I understand that I owe something to my less fortunate brothers, but I'll be damned (I guess so) before I give it to a minister who drives a better car than me. I don't mind supporting ministries, but I've got my priorities.

It's My Day Off
A brother works hard all week long. Now if I could go to Church at 10am and be done at 11am, I'd be fine. But you know and I know some ministers act like we have nothing else to do *all day* Sunday. OK I understand that you slaved over a hot desk working on that sermon all week and you just can't wait to rock our worlds with your message, but uhm... some of us are just checking in.

Church is Just Church
And I've got options. Now I could envision one day, perhaps after I have paid my debt to society and get out of jail and don't have a job or any friends or anyone who trusts me, I will be in church all the time. I'll come on Sunday, and I'll hang around and eat all the cookies, and I'll stare lovingly at the homely single women in their 40s, and I'll be back for Bible Study. And I'll come on the day we read to the shut-ins, and I'll volunteer to drive the church bus. I'll always help put away the chairs in the parish hall and I'll straighten out all the fliers on the bulletin board. But until then I actually do have a busy life to enjoy that centers around my family and community, not church. I got places to go and things to do.[4]

In reviewing these articles with the participants, many of them shared the same sentiments. Ultimately, the small group model of ministry empowered the men of the Stonewall Manor Subdivision to take another look at the church and make a commitment to at least attending one or two services.

[4]Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

This ministry project model was administered over an eight-week session to give the participants and opportunity to have fellowship, bond, trust one another and begin a process of self-disclosure regarding reasons they were not actively engaged in a church of their choice.

The men were all from the Stonewall Manor Subdivision, and although they were from the same neighborhood, they were not familiar with one another. The hypothesis of this ministry model posited that if men would engage in small group gatherings, they would be more inclined to attend a local congregation. There were a total of fifteen men participating in the ministry project. All fifteen men actively engaged the process until the end.

The first class began by explaining to the participants that the small group gatherings were a part of a doctoral project and they would be his focus group. The option to not participate in the study/project was given to the participants; however, none of them chose to opt out. The participants were assured that everything that would take place during the small group gatherings, including the surveys, would remain confidential.

Four members of Friendship Community Church were selected to be context associates for the doctoral project. The context associates were: Dr. William Chappell (Minister), Minister Darryl Pipkin, Minister LaSundra Dudley and Minister Carlton

Releford. After meeting and explaining the doctoral project to all of the context associates, they were all given the project proposal to give them an overview of the project. The role of the context associates was to assist in facilitating small group discussion, to distribute and collect project materials such as surveys, handouts, and note pads and to assist in tabulating the data received from each participant.

Three professional associates were chosen to assist in this ministry project, Dr. Donald E. Bryant, Dr. Calvin L. Gibson, and Dr. Beresford Adams, Each of the professional associates was sent a project proposal for review. The role of the professional associated was to review, critique and provide technical assistance on the written document.

Male Fellowship Speak Easies

Participants were given forms to fill out regarding items discussed in each session. The discussion topics were around these broad topic areas:

- Movies
- sports
- adventure
- sex
- cars

It was decided not to record the information from the speak easy sessions because this was a time when the men bonded and allowed themselves to speak honestly about subjects that many of them were not always proud of. While there were general topics provided to lead the discussion, because of the freedom gained from the small group

gathering, many of the men went off topic to discuss issues that were profoundly honest and spoke of the main that they carried around because they had no safe place to process their feelings.

Bible Studies

The topics of the Bible studies gave the men an opportunity to hear from God and to discuss the role that men played in salvation history. The passages selected where chosen because they were not the typical men going to war type passages, rather these text-identified men in a nurturing, thoughtful and responsible role.

Mission Possible: You Have No Choice
1 Timothy 5:1-8

This text allowed participants to experience God's idea of how to live in community with men and women that is different to how we relate to one another even in the 21st century. This text showed men that it was expected of them to treat older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters and widows with the utmost respect. Responses from this lesson showed that men has a wayward understanding of God's expectations as they felt to do what the text encouraged was to show signs of weakness; something that they could not afford to do in this current society. They felt that if men did not project an image of strength and power, they would be disrespected.

Blessed Men
Psalm 1:1-6

This text allowed participants to understand what is required to be blessed of God. It spoke to the happiness of men who walk upright in the sight of God and the misery of

men who are wicked and do evil in the sight of God. The participants were given an opportunity to discuss life from both perspectives and to identify the reasons they are able to walk upright and reasons when they find themselves walking wayward. This lesson brought our many of the reasons men do not attend church. They commented that male preachers are supposed to be examples for other men to follow but they are often the main persons walking wayward. The participants saw this as being hypocritical.

Dominion Without Domination
Genesis 1:26-27

This text participants were allowed to grapple with the most basic and urgent questions of life are: Who Am I? And why am I here? The participants were allowed to speak candidly about their perceptions of God and why God made us in his image. They were again vocal regarding the issue of image. Many of the men commented that the image of God in the church is the pastor and when the pastor is not right, then it's difficult to do what's right or follow a pastor who is not going right.

On Being Responsible
2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

In this text the participants were allowed to share what it meant to be responsible and how impactful it is to pray for someone and to know that someone is praying for you. One particular participant commented that prayer and asking for prayer is not something that men do. He said that while he knows that prayer is important, he believes it is a personal thing, something that is between him and God. After the study concluded, it was clear that his perspective about prayer and being responsible to pray for others is a sigh of strength and not weakness.

Small Group Gathering Questionnaire Analysis

1. It is important to be a member of a church family.
   85 percent of the men strongly agree that it is important to be a member of a church family and 15 percent agree. A church family is a place of significance for these men. The men view church life as necessary.

2. Attending church on a regular basis makes me a stronger Christian.
   90 percent of the men strongly agree that attending church on a regular basis makes them a stronger Christian and 10 percent agree. Male presence in church activities is closely connected with male participation.

3. It is important to attend Wednesday evening prayer meeting and Bible study.
   75 percent of the men strongly agree that Wednesday Evening Prayer Meeting and Bible Study are important to attend and 25 percent agree. The response for prayer meeting and bible study attendance is strong but their responses are not as strong as participation in other church activities.

4. Attending Sunday Church school on a regular basis s essential to my spiritual growth.
   70 percent of the men strongly agree that attending Sunday Church School on a regular basis is essential to their spiritual growth and 30% agree. The men view their spiritual growth closely related to the Church Sunday School. (These results do not indicate whether they actually come to Sunday Church School.) The responses during the interview were even more enthusiastic than the writer anticipated.

5. Becoming a member of a small group ministry is important.
   75 % of the men strongly agree that becoming a member of a small group was important; 15 percent agree and 10 percent were undecided. The responses reveal strong support for this project's hypothesis.

6. I would consider becoming a part of a small group ministry at a local church.
   90 percent of the men strongly agree they would consider becoming a member of a small group ministry in a local church and 10 percent agree. There is strong support for the male small group ministry. The fellowship is very important with this group.

7. Being able to discuss male issues in a safe space is meaningful to males.
   50 percent strongly agreed that being able to discuss male issues in a safe space is meaningful to males, 25 percent agree and 25 percent are undecided.

8. My faith in God has gotten stronger over the past five years.
   90 percent of the men strongly agree that their faith in God has got 10 stronger over the past five years and 10 percent agree. The responses indicate a positive view about spiritual growth.

9. Knowing that God plays an influence in my life is important.
   95 percent of the men strongly agree that God is important in their lives and 5 percent agree. The men view knowing that God is in their lives as significant and noticeable.

10. The small group sessions allow me to express my feelings without pressure of being misunderstood.
    75 percent of the men strongly agree that small group sessions allow men to express feelings without pressure of being misunderstood.15 percent agree and 10 percent were undecided. There is strong support for the role of small group ministry in the influence of male participation, which is very consistent with item #5.

11. Male pastors played a role in the decline of male participation in the church.
    85 percent strongly agree that male pastors played a role in the decline of men's participation in the church and 15 percent agree. There is strong support for the impact of the male chorus on other ministries of the church.

12. Ministry opportunities can motivated men to have a stronger sense of mission and purpose.
    90 percent of the men strongly agree that ministry opportunities have motivated men to have a stronger sense of mission and purpose and 10 percent agree. The men support strongly the impact of ministry opportunities on a sense of mission and purpose. Making ministry opportunities known and available increase male participation and a sense of ministry.

13. Men have been more of a motivating factor for my faith development than women.
    95 percent of the men strongly agree that men have been more of a motivating factor for their faith development and church participation than women and 5 percent agree. The men view the influence of men as very important for their faith and church participation even though women were also important.

14. Men can motivate men to participate in church life more than women.
    90 percent of the men strongly agree that men can motivate men to participate in church life more than women and 10 percent agree. This item reveals what men believe about male motivation for church participation.

15. There were males in my family that motivated me to join the church.
    75 percent of men strongly agree that there were males in their families that motivated them to join the church, 15 percent agree and 10 percent were undecided. These responses indicate that these men had male presence and motivation in their families.

16. There were males in my church who motivated me to join the church.
    85 percent of the men strongly agree that there were males in their church who

motivated them to join the church and 15 percent agree. Church males had great influence on men joined the church.

17. I encourage other men to attend church.
    90 percent of the men strongly agree that they encouraged other men to attend church and 10 percent agree. These men reach out to other men inviting them to church.

18. I encourage men to be more active in church life.
    85 percent of the men strongly agree that they encourage men to be more active in church life and 15 percent agree. These men support men in being more active in church activities.

19. I had positive male role models in my life while I was growing up.
    75 percent of the men strongly agree that they had positive male role models in their lives while growing up, 15 percent agree and 10 percent were undecided. These men had good male presence in their lives but the responses reflect that some of the men lacked positive male presence.

20. I will consider attending Friendship for worship.
    90 percent of the men strongly agree that they would consider attending Friendship for worship and 10 percent agree. These responses indicate that the men feel strongly enough about the small group experience to risk attending church.

Pre/Post Survey Analysis

The pre and post surveys of secular habits of the program participants showed percentage decreases in all but one area. The percentages of each decrease are as follows:

- Partying 50%
- Drinking 33%
- Cursing 55%
- Gossiping 67%
- Fornication 43%
- Being Spiteful 62%
- Adultery 53%
- Stealing 53%

- Lying 75%

The area of smoking showed an increase of 48 percent. This data was quite confusing to because the habitual misdeeds listed before individuals accepted Christ should not have changed in terms of reduction. The percentage levels from the pre-survey and the post survey should have been close to the same.

The pre and post surveys of the project participants in the area of sinful habits stopped since walking with Jesus showed increases in most areas. The percentage increases are as follows:

- Drinking 23%
- Cursing 31%
- Gossiping 15%
- Fornication 23%
- Being Spiteful 0%
- Adultery 0%
- Stealing 7%
- Lying 8%

The answers for adultery and being spiteful/mean remained the same in both surveys. There was an 8 percent decrease in area of partying. It is believed that these results are more in-line with the expectancy of the small group gathering.

The program participants' showed growth in all of the stated areas of pre and post surveys. The increase in percentages, of each area, is as follows:

- Witnessing 7%
- Daily Devotion 15%

- Attending Bible Study 31%
- Fasting 23%
- Prayer 39%
- Ministry Work 23%
- Mentoring 46%
- Loving Difficult People 23%

In the area of daily bible reading the pre and post survey showed an increase of 25 percent among the new believers that made-up the focus group.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Attracting men to church is not an easy task. There is overwhelming evidence that suggest that men avoid the church like the plague. In many congregational settings, men are in scare supply and getting them to commit to a life of service unto God is like trying to raise the dead. Men seem to have put a stake in the ground or dropped an anchor to avoid church at all cost. We have looked at some of the reasons that men do not attend church and we have looked at scholars and congregational growth expert methods to lure or attract men to church. From both extremes, a common denominator is getting the church to meet the relevant needs of men who become sheltered, closed and introverted when it comes to expressing their feelings. Because the church is not meeting this critical need among men, their presence remains dismal and their participation is lacking.

The journey from my first intensive to this final document has been one of stretching, molding and revisiting my own presuppositions about ministry and ways in which the church must retool itself in order to be vital and sustainable in this current century.

This road of self-discovery has been at times overwhelming and taxing. Understanding the nuances of self-directed learning and adult-education is a task within itself. Most of my life, education has been based on face-to-face learning where an instructor guided you through a program of learning based on a predetermined set of

norms that must be mastered and demonstrated prior to proceeding to the next level. This process became comfortable as the instructor spoon-fed information to the student in bite sized portions with follow-up, tutoring and monitoring to ensure the student attained at least a base level of knowledge. With self-directed learning, the participant is both instructor and student. This process allows the participant to learn while teaching others and then learn from the teaching exercise how to best modify instruction so that a higher level of learning can be attained. This process is also geared to those who are self-motivated as no one is there to prod and nudge you along toward a desired end. With self-directed learning, the entire process is based on the needs, abilities and desires of those seeking to gain a higher level of knowledge. For this reason, it was a struggle to matriculate through this program, as mentors were not traditional teachers, rather they were there to coach, equip and support the individual student toward their own individual learning.

The section on writing the spiritual autobiography and context papers were very revealing and heartfelt. This process necessitated a time of critical reflection and analytical awareness as the spiritual journey of the student and the context where ministry takes place created a space of commonality. It was in this common place or synergy that it was discovered the reason and meaning for my ministry at this point in my journey of faith. It was here that lessons learned along the journey toward spiritual leadership took shape and galvanized itself into awareness that God really does use the gifts and experiences of the *called* to provide healing, wholeness and problem solving for the context they were in. Without this discovery, often time's pastors and ministry leaders miss the critical reason for their divine placement by God.

The most helpful dimension of this process was the understanding how the art of critical reflection and scholarly research forms the foundation out of which problems can be solved holistically. It was also necessary to discover that ministry should not and cannot be done in a vacuum. It was confirmed through scripture and experience that God never intended for any one individual to work in ministry alone if it is to be called kingdom building. Many errors in judgment have historically made trying to provide servant leadership without the assistance of those who had complimentary gifts and abilities for the task at hand. Without the assistance of context associates, professional associates, peer associates and mentors, this process would have been nothing short of a book report. Every person who involved themselves in this work played an instrumental part in shaping, molding and identifying the best practices need for this process and project to be a success. Team based ministry has become a new and exciting way to serve the kingdom of God and it has encouraged a spirit of collaboration and cooperative leadership.

This process began as an idea that morphed into a critical part of the puzzle toward gaining and maintaining men in the life of the church. The small group ministry process was invaluable in that it was biblical based, theologically sound and historically relevant for this current age. Through this process it was discovered that men do not have a faith problem, they have a problem with institution religion that does not meet their ever-pressing demands and needs. When the needs of men are met and nurtured over time, men are more inclined to participate fully in the life of a congregation. There are so many men engaging in public life that choose to have only a personal relationship with God devoid of the institutional church's involvement.

If the church is to systemically make changes in the communities in which they are planted, it must broaden its scope of ministry related services and began catering to the needs of men who are able and willing to serve God in spirit and in truth as a collective body. Men and the church need each other in order to become impactful in at home, with their children, at work and in the community at large.

Watching men who did not have a strong relationship prior to the invitation to participate in the project grow to trust and share openly with one another was a hallmark of the program. Men actually have deep thoughts about the church, how the church spends money, how the church manages its affairs and the overall image of the church in public life. More importantly, men expressed a desire to have a communal relationship with God and the people of God provided there are ministries and opportunities to have their needs met.

Interacting with men who have avoided church involvement was a sobering opportunity. Being able to have men open up and be transparent about issues of faith and the importance of improving the quality of life for people who live in their community was a God moment. Data retrieved from the field research indicates that men may need a pastoral leader assigned specifically to them to ensure their ongoing needs are met and to continue a process of meeting in small groups for fellowship and affirmation.

The overall ministry project was success and revealing. It was a major breakthrough in identifying meaningful ways to call men together around issues of ultimate concern; their faith. The participants expressed their desire to continue meeting as a small group with faith issues being a central part of why them gather. This was an important discovery. Men who actually find meaning in gathering together to share their

struggles, learn from others experience and actually find ways to change was very telling. The issue that was not resolved in this project was what would happen over the course of time when these men continued to meet in a structured and safe environment; would this process lead to church membership and participation?

Some of the successes of this ministry project were getting men to gather and share honestly, having men commit to making a difference in their local community and having men commit to continued gatherings for affirmation and growth. Challenges were not having identified opportunities for men to serve the church or community during the project testing phase, underestimating the deep level of concern and commitment of those who participated and not being able to track the difference small group ministry with men could have on the life of a congregation seeking to increase male participation and attendance. If this project could be repeated, an extended time frame would be allowed for discussion and male bonding. An opportunity would be provided for those who participated to form subgroups thereby attracting additional men who did not participate in the initial process. Having men encourage other men to join small groups would be the portal and entry point for them becoming sensitive to the needs of the church and how their active involvement could lead to a greater quality of life and a reduction of crime in their neighborhoods.

This project and methodology could be replicated in any congregational setting where men are in small numbers and where church leadership see the value of structuring men specific small groups to meet the ever demanding needs of men who need a place to gather and self-identify.

Unlike large gathering of men such as Promise Keepers, every neighborhood in American is filled with men who have no place to congregate around male specific issues. The more male specific small groups are created by neighborhood churches, a dynamic revolution of epic proportions will occur all across America for the good of the church and the communities they operate in.

APPENDIX A

SMALL GROUP GATHERING

APPENDIX A

SMALL GROUP GATHERING

Please check your age group

___ 18-24 ___ 25-35 ___ 36-45 ___ 46-55 ____ 56 & up

1. List the sinful habits that did before being having God in your life.

___ Drinking ___ Lying ___ Stealing

___ Smoking ___ Partying ___ Being Spiteful

___ Gossiping ___ Fornication ___ Selfishness

___ Cursing ___ Adultery

2. Check five things that you have stop doing since walking with Jesus?

___ Drinking ___ Lying ___ Stealing

___ Smoking ___ Partying ___ Being Spiteful

___ Gossiping ___ Fornication ___ Selfishness

___ Cursing ___ Adultery

___ Other (Please explain below)

_____

_____

3. Please check the areas in which you believe you have grown.

___ Loving difficult people ___ Ministry work ___ Attending Bible Study

___ Mentoring ___ Prayer ___ Daily devotion

___ Church fellowship ___ Fasting ___ Witnessing

4. List The Number of Worship Services You Attend Each Month. ____

If less than four then list why:

___ Job ___ Time ___ Not Interested

____ Not fully Committed _____ Lack of Transportation

5. How Often Do You Read Your Bible?

___ None ___ Sunday only ___ Once a day ___ Twice a day

___ More than three times a day

6. How Often Do You Pray?

___ None ___ Sunday only ___ Once a day ___ Twice a day

___ More than three times a day

APPENDIX B

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONNAIRE

APPENDIX B
Small Group Gatherings
Interview Questions

Part 1: check the answer that best reflects your opinion.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. It is important to be a member of a church family.					
2. Attending church on a regular basis makes me a stronger Christian.					
3. It is important to attend Wednesday Evening Prayer Meeting and Bible Study.					
4. Attending Sunday Church School on a regular basis is essential to my spiritual growth.					
5. Becoming a member of a small group ministry is important.					
6. I would consider becoming a part of a small group ministry in a local church.					
7. Being able to discuss male issues in a safe space is meaningful to males.					
8. My faith in God has gotten stronger over the past five years.					
9. Knowing that God plays an influence in my life is important.					
10. The small group sessions allow me to express my feelings without pressure of being misunderstood.					
11. Male pastors played a role in the decline of male participation in the church.					
12. Ministry opportunities can motivated men to have a stronger sense of mission and purpose.					
13. Men have been more of a motivating factor for my faith development than women.					
14. Men can motivate men to participate in church life more than women.					
15. There were males in my family that motivated me to join the church.					
16. There were males in my church who motivated me to join the church.					
17. I encourage other men to attend church.					
18. I encourage men to be more active in church life.					
19. I had positive male role models in my life while I was growing up.					
20. I will consider attending Friendship for worship					

What level of education did you complete?

___ A. Below High School
___ B. High School
___ C. Bachelor's Degree
___ D. Master's Degree

What is your age group?

___ A. Under 20
___ B. 20-30
___ C. 31-40
___ D. 41-50
___ E. 51-60
___ F. 61-70
___ G. 71 and above

Analysis of Small Group Questions

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. It is important to be a member of a church family.	17	3			
2. Attending church on a regular basis makes me a stronger Christian.	18	2			
3. It is important to attend Wednesday Evening Prayer Meeting and Bible Study.	15	5			
4. Attending Sunday Church School on a regular basis is essential to my spiritual growth.	14	6			
5. Becoming a member of a Men's Ministry would encouraged me to join a church.	15	3	2		
6. A Brotherhood ministry is an important male ministry for the church.	18	2			
7. Being a member of a church ministry is meaningful to males participation in the church.	10	5	5		
8. My faith in God has gotten stronger over the past five years.	18	2			
9. Current church activities do not meet my needs for fellowship and provide a place to share and vent.	19	1			
10. The Male Fellowship played a role in your participation in this project.	15	3	2		
11. The Male Fellowship would play a role in increasing your participation in other male ministries of the church.	17	3			
12. Men specific ministry opportunities would motivated you to have a stronger sense of mission and purpose.	18	2			
13. Men have been more of a motivating factor for my faith development and church participation than women.	19	1			
14. Men can motivate men to participate in church life more than women.	18	2			
15. There were males in my family that motivated me to join the church.	15	3	2		
16. There were males in my church who motivated me to join the church.	17	3			
17. I would encourage other men to attend church.	18	2			
18. I would encourage men to be more active in	17	3			

church life.					
19. I had positive male role models in my life while I was growing up.	15	3	2		
20. I invite others to attend FMBC for worship	18	2			

What level of education did you complete?

A. Below High School (2)

B. High School (7)

C. Bachelor's Degree (8)

D. Master's Degree (3)

What is your age group?

A. Under 20
B. 20-30
C. 31-40 (2)
D. 41-50 (3)
E. 51-60 (5)
F. 61-70 (7)
G. 71 and above (3)

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